

Journalism and Suicide Reporting Guidelines: Perspectives, Partnerships and Processes

M.A. Thesis

Julia Gandy

Supervised by: Jenepher Lennox Terrion

Department of Communication

University of Ottawa

Keywords: suicide contagion, suicide reporting guidelines,
phenomenology, excellence theory, cross-sector communication

© Julia Gandy, Ottawa, Canada, 2014

Abstract

Research suggests that reporting suicide has the potential to influence vulnerable individuals to emulate suicide behaviour. Media guidelines for the responsible reporting of suicide have been developed and disseminated worldwide, but with mixed success. One factor that may influence guideline uptake is the degree to which health professionals have collaborated with the media professionals in guideline development, dissemination and implementation. The study used semi-structured interviews with media professionals to understand attitudes towards the guidelines, to explore the ways in the media were engaged in communication regarding the guidelines, and to identify whether this engagement bears upon media attitudes toward the guidelines. Findings indicate that media professionals view the guidelines as useful information within the bounds of normal reporting, but find them difficult to implement. Excellence theory indicates that the predominantly one-way and asymmetrical strategies used to engage the media in communication around the guidelines may play a role in these attitudes. The study echoes literature suggesting that collaborative guideline development and implementation is essential to meaningfully change suicide reporting practices.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the many people who contributed to the completion of this thesis. First, my thesis supervisor, Jenepher Lennox-Terrion, for her guidance and ever-cheery, encouraging disposition. Second, the study participants who made data collection as fun and interesting as it was, and reconfirmed my passion for the topic throughout the study. Third, my parents for providing me with endless support and for inspiring the idea behind the study. Lastly to Liam, whose encouragement, patience and support kept me grounded in what is important. Thank you all.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	6
Background.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Research Questions.....	15
Methodology.....	16
Thesis Structure	16
Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework.....	18
Media, Ethics and Decision-Making.....	18
Public Relations and Communication Management.....	27
Research Rationale.....	46
Chapter Three: Methodology	49
Research Approach	49
Sampling Strategy and Participants	50
Data Collection Procedures.....	53
Data Analysis	55
Establishing the Trustworthiness of the Study.....	57
Chapter Four: Results	59
Theme 1. Media Culture	59
Theme 2: Media Learning.....	67
Theme 3: Decision-Making in Reporting Suicide	75
Theme 4: Changes in Social Landscape	80
Theme 5: Media Responsibility	88

Chapter Five: Discussion..... 94

RQ.1. How do media professionals in English-speaking news organizations in Canada perceive the suicide reporting guidelines? 94

RQ.2. How do media professionals describe their engagement in communication regarding the guidelines? 98

RQ.3. Does engagement in communication affect media professionals’ perceptions of the guidelines? 101

Chapter Six: Conclusion 111

Summary of Findings..... 111

Thesis Limitations..... 112

Research, Practice and Policy Implications 113

References 115

Appendix A: Canadian Psychiatric Association Suicide Reporting Guidelines..... 129

Appendix B: Interview Guide 130

Appendix C: Coding Scheme..... 132

Chapter One: Introduction

Current research suggests that suicide may be a modeled behaviour, and that the media plays a role in perpetuating copycat suicide behaviour (Gould, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003). As such, health bodies have promoted the use of suicide reporting guidelines to reduce the risk of contagion (Gould et al., 2003). Uptake of these guidelines has varied around the world (Bohanna & Wang, 2012), and researchers have suggested that engagement of the media in the development and communication of the guidelines may play a role (Pirkis, Blood, Beautrais, Burgess, & Skehan, 2006). This thesis explores the attitudes held by Canadian editors and journalists regarding the guidelines, and examines whether these attitudes have been influenced by engagement in communication around developing, learning about, and using the guidelines.

Background

Despite advances in preventative, therapeutic and pharmaceutical treatment, suicide remains one of the leading causes of death in the developed world (Hawton, Saunders, & O'Connor, 2012; White, 2005). In Canada, suicide rates range from 15 in 100,000 to 75 in 100,000 depending on the demographic, and are the cause of 24% of deaths in youth under 24 and 16% of deaths in adults, representing a serious public health issue (Canadian Mental Health Association, n.d.; Melhum, 2004). Significant efforts are being made to recognize and curb individual, social and environmental risk factors such as untreated mental health concerns, poor coping skills, exposure to trauma, access to lethal means and stigma (White, 2005). However as suicide is always the result of multiple factors, it is difficult to control (Gould et al., 2003).

One risk factor that can be more readily managed than others, researchers argue, is suicide contagion as perpetuated by media (Gould et al., 2003). Theorists suggest that suicide contagion, or clusters of linked copycat suicide behaviour, is explained by the theory that suicide

is a modeled behaviour, and that those who have died by suicide can ‘infect’ others with this behaviour (Johansson, Lindqvist & Eriksson, 2006). Individuals already at risk of suicidal thoughts, attempts and other behaviours, may find similarities between themselves and those who have died by suicide, particularly if those deaths have occurred within a geographical proximity (e.g. in the same city or at the same school), a social proximity (i.e. in the same social circles or circumstances), or a psychological proximity (i.e. in a similar state of mental wellbeing or ill-health) (Zenere, 2009). Zenere (2009) argues that the media can act as a catalyst for broadcasting the conditions of those who have died by suicide, thereby increasing their proximity to those at risk of identifying with the deceased. News media items that can increase the risk of spreading contagion include discussing and providing images of the method and location of the suicide, using simplistic reasoning to theorize the cause of the suicide (i.e. she was bullied therefore she killed herself), framing the suicide as an act of a rational, healthy person, placing the word ‘suicide’ in the headline, giving undue prominence to the story within a newspaper, and repetitive or excessive news coverage.

Reports of clusters of suicide following mass exposure date back to 1774 with Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a story about a young man so consumed by love he takes his life. The book spawned several years of suicides with similar characteristics to *Werther* before it was taken out of circulation, at which point suicide deaths slowed (Sonneck, Etzerdorfer, & Nagel-Kuess, 1994). Phillips (1974) was the first researcher to track the trend by comparing suicide rates in months with front-page articles on suicides against rates in months where there was little to no suicide coverage. Phillips found that 26 of 33 months with stories about suicide saw increases in suicide rates in those regions. He concluded that suicide rates spiked during periods

of coverage of suicide in the news (de Leo & Vijayakumar, 2008). His findings laid the groundwork for suicide contagion theory.

Media contagion theory is grounded in theories of communication, education, psychology and media effects. For example, agenda setting theory finds that mass media assigns degrees of status to issues, such as suicide, and guides what is socially accepted. Improper reporting of suicide can therefore skew what the public views as the predominant causes and outcomes related to mental illness and suicide (Tully & Elsaka, 2004). Uses and gratification theory states that recipients select information that gives cognitive benefit or reinforcement to existing perspectives. Those at risk may seek out and identify more closely with information about victims of suicide and view themselves as having similar life situations and outcomes (Tully & Elsaka, 2004).

Most cited is Bandura's social learning theory which, in the context of suicide contagion, suggests that suicidal behaviours are learned rather than instinctively developed, and media reporting that presents suicidal behaviours as acceptable, commendable or glamorous can cause vulnerable observers to revere suicide victims. Vulnerable observers can look at the extent to which suicidal behaviour is being reinforced (glamourized, showered with sympathy, etc.) and may view the behaviour positively or see it as permission to act similarly. More exposure to such reinforced behaviour can lead to greater likelihood that behaviour will be modeled (Pirkis, Burgess, Francis, Blood, & Jolley, 2006).

Psychology research suggests that modeling behaviour can relate to low levels of attachment to close family, peers or community in vulnerable individuals with suicidal thoughts or behaviours, particularly youth. When young people have closer attachments to individuals with whom they have more unstable relationships such as peers or romantic interests as opposed

to parents and trusted adults, they may be more vulnerable to be influenced by the views and actions of those who have died by suicide. Cheng (2014) argues that if young people have strong attachments to parents and other nurturing adults, they are more likely to be resilient in the face of such events.

Media effects theories suggest that the media has a significant and substantial impact on the way individuals, in particular children, view the world, including constructing perceptions of reality and reinforcing particular stereotypes and behaviours (Perse, 2001, p. 12). According to this theory, continued reinforcement of suicide framed in a particular way may influence an individual to act similarly, like violence in the media may breed aggression, or images of thin models may lead to eating disorders. Since Philips' (1974) study, evidence has continued to indicate a relationship between media influence and suicide contagion (de Leo & Vijayakumar, 2008; Pirkis & Blood, 2001). Pirkis et al. (2006b) maintain that there is a suggestion of causality between reporting and contagion based on criteria of consistency, strength, temporality, specificity and coherence of the research evidence. Most recently, Swanson and Colman (2013) determined that reading or hearing about the suicide of a peer may increase the likelihood of suicidal ideation or behaviour. The study found that these modeled behaviours are most pronounced in younger teenagers. As suggested in Swanson and Colman's (2013) study, the effects of media contagion are particularly pronounced in youth (Hawton et al., 2012). In their study of suicide contagion in youth, Gould et al. (2003) maintained that the risk of contagion for youth between 15 and 19 is two to five times higher than that of older populations, and that the effects of contagion drop off significantly after the age of 24. This greater susceptibility has been attributed to a mix of psychological, behavioural, physiological and neurological differences

between youth and adults in terms of impulsivity, attachment and capacity for consequential thinking (Pandey, 2001; White, 2005).

However, media contagion is just one factor among many. In most suicide-related research, causality is difficult to determine; suicide is an outcome of a complex multitude of chronic and acute factors that can rarely be attributed to one thing (Kutcher & Chehil, 2012; Manion, 2014). In fact, Stewart, Manion, Davidson, and Cloutier (2001) state that predicting suicide is nearly impossible. One study in suicide contagion research also failed to find any evidence that exposure to suicide behaviour is a risk factor for suicide thoughts and behaviour (Mercy et al., 2001).

Furthermore, the notion of suicide contagion as perpetuated by the media is firmly rooted in the tradition that accepts media effects theory as true. Media effects theory suggests that the media can have significant and substantial effects on society (Perse, 2001, p. 3). These include intended effects, such as affecting consumer purchasing, voting behaviour and health and social behaviour, as well as unintended consequences, including inciting aggressive through displays of violence, stereotyping particular social groups, or constructing misrepresented realities (Perse, 2001 p. 2). Effects of the media are logical to assume, given society's inundation with various forms of media, and media, communication, sociology and psychology scholars have devoted time and attention to assessing these effects. However, there is a significant amount of research to counter these claims. Gauntlett (1998) argues that in the 30 odd years of media effects research, direct effects have not actually been clearly identified. The author explores the many issues with the media effects research, such as the methodological limitations, ideologically conservative starting assumptions, research from artificial situations, and failure to define the object of study. Freedman (2002) similarly identifies that there are shortcomings with design and

interpretation of media effects research. Gauntlett (1998) also states that media effects theories fail to account for the environmental influences that may lead to ‘effects;’ for example, believing that violent programming affects youth may ignore factors such as poverty, unemployment and systematic oppression. Perse (2001, p. 10) maintains that these types of environmental factors are more significant than the media. Gauntlett (1998) further mentions the failure of media effects research to consider the variety of interpretations and meanings created by the media and received by audiences. Meanings and contexts vary significantly, so the assumption that media affects individuals the same way across the board may be, as Perse (2001, p. 5) argues, simplistic.

Despite these issues, health researchers and practitioners are becoming increasingly aware that the media is an important partner to engage in any suicide prevention effort, as they are prominent voices in a community that can help to shape the social discourse around mental health and suicide (de Leo & Vijayakumar, 2008; Melhum, 2004). de Leo and Vijayakumar (2008) highlight the particular abilities of the media in raising awareness, reducing stigma, promoting help seeking behaviour, increasing the visibility of services, and mobilizing communities around suicide prevention more broadly. Grounded in a belief of the significance of media effects, efforts have been made worldwide to decrease the prevalence of one risk factor for suicide, media reporting, by developing strategies for reporting on suicide that will reduce the likelihood of stories leading to contagion (Bohanna & Wang, 2012; Gould et al., 2003). Researchers have identified factors in media reports that they believe contribute to contagion and have developed a set of guidelines for reporting suicide to reduce the effects of contagion, and consequently, suicide rates (de Leo & Vijayakumar, 2008). While guidelines differ slightly around the world, each set lists items such as avoiding details of method or location, refraining

from using the word 'suicide' in a headline, reducing repeated or excessive coverage of a suicide, avoiding romanticizing or sensationalizing the suicide, avoiding simplistic reasoning for why the suicide occurred, conveying messages of hope and survival, and offering links to resources for those who may be struggling. For the Canadian Psychiatric Association's list of guidelines, please see Appendix A.

Pirkis et al. (2006a) find that the implementation and subsequent effects of guideline use has been mixed around the world. For example, in 1987, Austria implemented suicide reporting guidelines after a highly profiled subway suicide spawned an increase in the rate of suicides, and in particular subway suicides (Etzersdorfer & Sonneck, 1998). Following the implementation of the guidelines, suicide rates decreased by 20% throughout Austria, and subway suicide rates declined by 75% (de Leo & Vijayakumar, 2008). However, as Picard (2009) notes, this research failed to control for the introduction of rail line barriers as a variable. In Australia, researchers found that guidelines significantly affected attitudes of journalists and the sensitivity of reporting practices, though outcomes related to changing suicide rates were not analyzed (Pirkis et al., 2009; Skehan, Greenhalgh, Hazell, & Pirkis, 2006). A study by Pirkis et al. (2006b) also failed to find correlations between particular guideline items and the effects they were meant to control, as well as differences in effects for males and for females. In addition, the media guidelines were developed to reduce the potential of the media to contribute to suicide contagion, a concept that is premised on the assumption that that media effects are significant and substantial, which some research argues may not be the case. Critics of media effects theories claim that effects are only correlational, and like suicide research, may be the result of a variety of individual, social and environmental factors (Gauntlett, 1998; Perse, 2001 p. 10).

The media themselves have also met the concept of suicide reporting guidelines with mixed reception, from acceptance to confusion, resistance and backlash. While reporters in Australia and Austria, for example, have generally bought into and implemented the guidelines successfully (Niederkrontenthaler & Sonneck, 2007; Pirkis et al., 2009), others in countries such as New Zealand have resisted them (Collings & Kemp, 2010; Tully & Elsaka, 2004). While a paucity of peer-reviewed information exists in Canada, in news articles, opinion pieces and public debates, journalists have similarly questioned the appropriateness of suicide reporting guidelines, alluding to questions around the validity of contagion research (Casey, 2011; Kimball, 2013), the potential for guidelines to contribute to stigma (Coulson, 2012; Goldbloom & Picard, 2012; Lowman, 2013), and questions around the role of the media in this issue (McKeon, 2011), to name a few.

It is important to note that while much research has explored the relationship between media and suicide, as well as the use of guidelines by media outlets, few studies actually address media attitudes towards reporting suicide and towards suicide reporting guidelines. Pirkis et al. (2006a) note that little is known about the factors that influence journalists to use the guidelines or reject them, and suggest that an examination of the role of engagement in the processes of developing, disseminating and educating about the suicide reporting guidelines may be warranted. Case examples from the international context suggest that the level of media engagement in guideline development or on-going participation in education and training may play a role in changing media attitudes and practices (Bohanna & Wang, 2012; Pirkis et al., 2006a). In Australia, guidelines were developed in a partnership between the government, mental health institutes and the Mindframe Media Initiative called the Mindframe Media and Mental Health partnership (Pirkis et al., 2006a). This partnership brought members of the media on

board to consult in guideline development. The partnership also developed extensive resources, training opportunities for journalists and editors, and additional supports (Skehan et al., 2006). The Mindframe Media and Mental Health partnership has fostered greater overall support for guidelines as well as increased guideline adherence (Pirkis et al., 2006; Skehan et al., 2006). Similar outcomes have also been seen in Austria through the partnership and campaigns developed in response to the Viennese subway suicides (Etzersdofer & Sonneck, 1998; Niederkrontenthaler & Sonneck, 2007), while in New Zealand, the top-down directives from the Ministry of Health were met with disapproval and resistance from members of the media (Collings & Kemp, 2010; Tully & Elsaka, 2004). Collings and Kemp (2010) conducted interviews with members of the New Zealand media and inferred that a collaborative approach to guidelines development would have been an important factor in their encouraging their uptake. The full extent to which members of the Canadian media have been engaged and involved in dialogue around suicide reporting guidelines with health professionals is unclear¹.

Theoretical Framework

These examples illustrate that engaging the media in the development, dissemination and implementation of the guidelines is an effective way of fostering positive attitudes and engendering media support for guideline use. To achieve meaningful engagement and collaboration, Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) suggest that the use of strategic communication is necessary so that parties can develop understanding and positive relationships through which dialogue and collaboration can occur. The authors' excellence theory finds that the two-way

¹ During the final phase of thesis completion, the Canadian Journalism Forum on Trauma and Violence, CBC and the Mental Health Commission of Canada worked in partnership to develop the *Mindset* document (<https://sites.google.com/a/journalismforum.ca/mindset-mediaguide-ca/mindset-media-guide-eng>), released in May 2014, a for-journalists, by-journalists guide to reporting mental illness and suicide. The document's suicide reporting guidelines, rather than being prescriptive, stress the importance of respecting families, understanding the context of the suicide, and not shying away from reporting it. The development of the guide is an example of a collaborative effort to address suicide reporting in ways that are applicable to journalists.

symmetrical communication model is effective in doing so. Communication in this model is characterized by research and dialogue between organizations and publics, which can establish the conditions necessary to bring about changes in ideas, attitudes and behaviours on both sides (Grunig et al., 2002 p. 307). These conditions include the development of mutual understanding (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Plowman, 2007), open minds (Grunig et al., 2002 p. 123), neutralizing power dynamics (Grunig & White, 1992) and the creation of positive relationships (Grunig & Hon, 1999), among others. This thesis situates the research questions and analysis within Grunig's two-way symmetrical communication model. At its core, Grunig et al. (2002) propose that the model embodies the value of collaboration (p. 322). In this study, excellence theory and the two-way symmetrical communication model serve as a means to examine the link between the processes by which the guidelines were developed and shared with the media, and the attitudes of members of the media toward the guidelines from a communication perspective.

Research Questions

The aims of this thesis are to understand the media's experience with suicide reporting and the suicide reporting guidelines, and to examine whether engagement in communication is a factor in influencing attitudes through the following research questions:

Q.1. How do media professionals in English-speaking news organizations in Canada perceive the suicide reporting guidelines?

Q.2. How do media professionals describe their engagement in communication regarding the guidelines?

Q.3. Does engagement in communication affect media professionals' perceptions of the guidelines?

Within Grunig's excellence theory framework, this thesis would expect to find that media perceptions of greater levels of engagement through dialogue and the development of positive relationships as promoted in two-way symmetrical communication strategies would lead to more positive attitudes and opinions about the guidelines. Examples from Austria and Australia suggest that engagement may also lead to increased guideline uptake by the media.

Methodology

To answer the research questions, the study makes use of semi-structured interviews with journalists and editors from English-speaking print, radio and television news organizations across Canada. The methodology is appropriate in this context as the research questions center on perceptions and processes, both of which are complex concepts that cannot be adequately explored in closed-ended survey questions or short responses. Interviews with members of the media have been successful in drawing out opinions and attitudes about similar concepts in New Zealand and Australia, where journalists have been interviewed about their opinions of guidelines, the barriers they face in using the guidelines, the approaches of health organizations and governments (Collings & Kemp, 2010; Tully & Elsaka, 2004), and the importance of education and training for guideline implementation (Skehan et al., 2006).

Thesis Structure

This thesis is comprised of six chapters, including the introduction. In chapter two, the literature review explores two topics relevant to answering the research questions: first, media, media ethics and decision-making, including media values, the current climate surrounding the media and decision-making and ethics related to reporting suicide. Second, the chapter sets up the theoretical framework of the study by exploring the concepts inherent in excellence theory and two-way symmetrical communication, and the relevance of two-way symmetrical

communication in the context of suicide reporting guidelines. Chapter three describes the methodology, the semi-structured interview, and discusses the strengths, limitations, and relevance in answering the research questions of this approach. It further outlines the rationale for the sample size, recruitment strategy and thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Chapter four presents the major themes emergent from the interviews. Chapter five responds to the research questions in light of the study's results and discusses the implications of the research findings through the lens of the theoretical framework. The thesis concludes in chapter six with a summary of the research findings, discussion of the limitations of the study and the implications of the research more broadly.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This study's research questions and analysis are grounded in James Grunig and colleagues' excellence theory, and in particular, the two-way symmetrical communication model. This chapter will first provide an overview of the state of media reporting, ethics and decision-making, as well as the tensions that exist within the media between these processes and the issue of suicide reporting. It will then establish how excellence theory identifies and communicates with relevant publics, will describe the four models of public relations, and explore how the two-way symmetrical communication model, and the communication strategies inherent within it, contributes to relationship development, organizational effectiveness and the social responsibility of organizations.

Media, Ethics and Decision-Making

Media profession and context. Christians (2011) posits that journalism plays a central role in the maintenance of democracy. The flow of objective information, opinions and ideas free from the influence of governments and corporations allows citizens to make informed decisions about their own and their collective lives, and checks the powers of governments and corporations by forcing transparency and accountability (Christians, 2011). While the profession is varied, Deuze (2005) identified a core 'ideology' of journalism that exists globally in order to fulfill this social role. This ideology encompasses key elements of journalists' ideals and self-image, and includes: a sense of public service, which often justifies aggressive and investigative reporting. Objectivity, or neutrality or impartiality, is a preeminent ideal for journalists, as it is tied to perceptions of credibility (Deuze, 2005). The need for autonomy, which journalists believe is essential in order for them to thrive and adequately serve the public, often takes precedent over any extra-journalistic influence. The immediacy of the work, or the ability to

deliver the news as quickly as possible, is considered an essential value, according to Deuze. Finally, ethics in journalism are always strived for, as they legitimize the journalists' role as a free and fair watchdog serving society. In ethics, there is a commitment to truth and objectivity. While these values may not always be achieved, they provide journalists with normative framework for working in and toward. However, there are many challenges to this ideology, primarily market forces, which may put pressure on the ability of journalists to maintain these values in service to the public. Bozonelos (2004) notes that increasingly, the balance is being tipped towards the market model, which may challenge journalists' drive to remain objective, autonomous and ethical, and ultimately to serve the public through these means. Furthermore, concentration and convergence may dilute the diversity of media perspectives.

In Canada, a similar ideology or identity exists. Canadian communications scholar Arthur Siegel argues that the Canadian brand of journalism has developed as a blend of libertarian, social responsibility and civic journalism frameworks to become what it is today (as cited in Russell, 2006, p. 30). Russell (2006, p. 30) states that Canadian journalists consider themselves to be watchdogs whose role is to check arbitrary power, provide and give context to information (and increasingly, organize the chaos of the deluge of information) and serve the public in the interests of democracy. Canadian journalists are largely able to fulfill this role, as they enjoy a good amount of press freedom (Russell, 2006, p. 33). However, like many nations, Canada's media is becoming increasingly concentrated. Ownership of media is largely in the hands of Astral Media, Postmedia Network, CTVglobemedia, Shaw, Rogers Media and Quebecor Media (Potter & Babe, 2013). Unsurprisingly, there is tension as to whether owners have the right to influence editorial policy (Russell, 2006, p. 7).

Social responsibility. Given its importance in maintaining democratic institutions, many argue that journalism has a social responsibility, wherein the profession serves society by raising social issues to the plane of critical discussion (Christians, 2011). In this social responsibility tradition, journalism has a duty to the community to provide: “truthful, comprehensive and intelligent accounts of events in a context which gives them meaning” (Christians, 2011) so citizens can make sense of the events happening around them and practice appropriate self-governance (Russell, 2006, p. 31). However, McCurdy (2011) also intimates that, conversely, journalism is a for-profit business that, like other businesses, must maximize profit in order to survive. As media ownership becomes more centralized and corporate, profitability becomes increasingly important to ensure the sustainability of operations (Russell, 2006, p. 51). The market model, as noted, can be a threat to the social responsibility of journalism, as the pressure to sell stories, rope in advertisers, appease owners and compete with emerging new media can lead traditional media to cut ethical corners (Russell, 2006, p. 51). However, Russell (2006, p. 20) suggests that ultimately journalists are constrained by their responsibility to remain trustworthy and credible to their readers, who validate the quality of a news outlet with their readership and draw in advertisers.

This responsibility also places limitations on freedom of expression, as journalists must walk the line between selling the most interesting and newsworthy story, and remaining credible in the eyes of readers (Russell, 2006). Remaining credible, Russell (2006, p. 252) argues, is intrinsically tied to being ethical, and being ethical means, according to the Canadian Newspaper Association, operating in public interest (Steward, 2012). In order to operate in the interest of the public and serve the community, the media work under the guidance of codes of ethics, which

vary between countries, news organizations and individual editors and journalists (Himmelboim & Limor, 2010).

In their review of media codes of ethics worldwide, Himmelboim and Limor (2010) found that codes of ethics generally deal with managing conflicts of interest, relationships with sources, plagiarism, deception, biases, objectivity and truthfulness. However Russell (2006, p. 236) notes that most codes are not concrete due to the varied nature of the business and the importance of dealing with difficulties in a responsive manner. Codes of ethics are also difficult to enforce or police as they need to be case by case, and there are few governing bodies that can effectively deal with unethical journalism beyond public criticism and peer pressure (Russell, 2006, p. 240). Furthermore, rigid codes of ethics can be met with resistance, including criticisms of threats to freedom of expression, censorship and sanitizing reality, particularly if they come from outside sources or are handed down from upper-level management (Bohanna & Wang, 2012; Collings & Kemp, 2010). Codes are more respected and adhered to when there is collective discussion, contribution and consensus at all levels of an organization, as it conveys to everyone the importance and value of ethics within the profession (Russell, 2006, p. 234). In Canada, the Canadian Press (CP) Style Guide has largely guided ethical standards (Russell, 2006, p. 10). While ethics is only one section, most news organizations and individual reporters have a copy of CP Style and editors routinely encourage staff to consult it. The basic ethical principles in CP Style are that ethics are important to journalism and that ethical behaviour is key to credibility (Russell, 2006, p. 10).

Ethics and decision-making. As Swaffield (2011) notes, in considering the challenges of ethical, yet economically oriented journalism, journalists and editors are often faced with the difficulties of balancing what the public *wants* to know against what the public *ought* to know,

with respect to the potential impact of stories, when choosing what to publish and what to suppress. Russell (2006, p. 16) argues that, in general, stories are considered newsworthy when they deviate from the norm, are in proximity to readers, are immediate and impactful, are prominent, and address conflict, controversy, disaster or human interest. Unfortunately, this often includes tragic, difficult or controversial stories that can have a serious impact on the public and on the credibility of the media if not reported properly (Russell, 2006, p. 20). In deciding what to report and how to do it, media professionals consider such aspects as invasion of privacy, overall effect on audiences, news value, timeliness and impact on the public. If it is a particularly important yet difficult story, a broader social benevolence such as increasing dialogue or linking the story to related social issues must outweigh potential negative impact (Swaffield, 2011).

Corbo and Zweifel (2013) state that there is a need for journalists to be aware of the potential impact their stories can have on audiences, as well as to approach stories with caution, as the nature of their profession does not lend itself well to contemplative reporting where sensitivity is needed. One such instance is reporting suicide. Traditionally, journalists have had a standing order not to report on suicides (i.e. state simply “he/she died”) (Knowlton & Reader, 2009). However, Corbo and Zweifel (2013) find there is a mounting sense of social responsibility throughout the media to address the issue of suicide reporting, particularly in light of contagion theory. Journalists themselves also feel that part of their social responsibility is to incite dialogue about difficult topics (Collings & Kemp, 2010) and raise them to the plane of critical discussion (Christians, 2011). The ethical dilemma, Corbo and Zweifel (2013) argue, is in capturing truth through verification and rigorous care without sensationalizing, and to find the balance between a helpful suicide story that is driven by narrative depth and broader context, versus an unhelpful one driven by action and imagery.

Suicide reporting guidelines. Few newsrooms in Canada have specific protocols for reporting suicide. In 2009 the Canadian Psychiatric Association published the report “Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide” (Nepon, Fotti, Katz, & Sareen, 2009), with particular strategies journalists can use when reporting suicide. The report was based on international research stating that media management of content, placement, duration and sensationalism can reduce suicide attempts and suicide deaths, and that the use of guidelines by media professionals can foster change in overall story sensitivity and, consequently, reduction in the risk of suicidal behaviours (Pirkis et al., 2009). While few newsrooms have particular protocols, CP Style is often where editors refer Canadian journalists for ethical orientation on the subject (Russell, 2006, p. 10).

Guidelines have been developed in many countries, including at the international level through the World Health Organization, to provide members of the media with strategies to employ when reporting on someone who has died by suicide (de Leo & Vijayakumar, 2008; Gould, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003; Pirkis et al., 2009). As suicide is a public health issue, these guidelines have largely been developed by clinicians and suicide prevention specialists and disseminated through medical journals and psychiatric and health websites (Bohanna & Wang, 2012).

The media have been engaged in guideline development, dissemination and education to varying degrees worldwide (Pirkis et al., 2006a). In the United Kingdom, Bohanna and Wang (2012) and Pirkis et al. (2006a) note that the impetus to develop guidelines came from within the media itself, from the ethical journalism group MediaWise. In Australia, guidelines were developed in a partnership between the government, several mental health institutes and the Mindframe Media Initiative, a collective of media organizations and mental health agencies

(Pirkis et al., 2006a). The partnership also developed extensive resources, training opportunities for journalists and editors, and additional supports (Skehan et al., 2006). A review by Pirkis et al. (2009) demonstrates that the guidelines impacted reporting practices by improving the sensitivity of suicide reports. In Austria, Niederkrontenthaler and Sonneck (2007) report that a similar partnership was developed as a response to the Viennese subway suicides, and similar gains in reporting sensitivity were seen in studies as a result.

In contrast to these examples of involvement by the media in guideline development, guidelines in New Zealand were developed by health researchers in partnership with the New Zealand Ministry of Health, which subsequently made following guidelines part of legislation. In interviews with journalists and editors, Collings and Kemp (2010) and Tully and Elsaka (2004) discovered that guidelines were being largely ignored, and to a certain extent opposed, by the New Zealand media. Media professionals revealed that the top-down directive from the guidelines did not reflect journalists' ethical and practical considerations (Collings & Kemp, 2010; Tully & Elsaka, 2004). Interviewees also shared that they felt there is increased receptivity to guidelines and other editorial constraints when they are developed from within the profession and take organizational, cultural and financial pressures into consideration (Tully & Elsaka, 2004). This finding reflects the assertion by Russell (2006, p. 234) that, as with any code of ethics in journalism, there is more likely to be resistance when there is not sufficient consultation and engagement in the development and dissemination process. However, Pirkis (2010) warns against generalizing these views, as the sample size used in the studies was small.

In Canada, guidelines were published in 2009 by the Canadian Psychiatric Association and various clinicians in conjunction with suicide prevention experts, and are distributed through the Canadian Psychiatric Association and Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention websites, as

well as regionally by provincial governments and private bodies (Nepon et al., 2009). Members of the media were surveyed anonymously to determine their processes for reporting suicide, however the media's role in creating the guidelines or the policies is not clear. Guideline publication was accompanied by a press release and radio interviews with the authors (Lahey, 2009).

Awareness and use of guidelines around the world is mixed, from the media accepting and appropriating guidelines on their own terms, to outright rejection stemming from beliefs that guidelines infringe upon editorial freedom and the right of the public to be informed (Bohanna & Wang, 2012). Corbo and Zweifel (2013) posit that journalists and other media professionals may agree with the guidelines, but ultimately find them too limiting in telling a story with significant content and context.

In their interviews with journalists and editors, Tully and Elsaka (2004) and Collings and Kemp (2010) found that though many members of the media believe that reporting suicide is important in sparking much needed mental health dialogue, there exists a perception that guidelines are forms of censorship that can in fact be more damaging than reporting suicide truly and objectively. Some media professionals continue to be skeptical of contagion theory altogether and believe that the strategies outlined in the guidelines are already covered in newsroom codes of ethics (Tully & Elsaka, 2004).

In Canada, members of the media have spoken out about their reluctance to use the suicide reporting guidelines. *Globe and Mail* health reporter and columnist Andre Picard (2009, September 17) argues against the guidelines, stating: "...the seemingly compassionate rules are a convenient excuse for avoiding discussion of (and reporting on) an issue that makes us highly uncomfortable." Picard also cites the limitations of the guidelines in light of emerging

technology and social media, arguing that those who are most affected by contagion, youth, generally do not get their news via mainstream media. Similarly, Liam Casey (2010, December 22) in the *Ryerson Review of Journalism* writes: “A powerful story exists every time someone kills himself...in my professional life, I’d like to act in a way that might inspire others to write a more hopeful narrative for themselves.” Lauren McKeon (2011, September 13) at the *Canadian Journalism Project* questions the role of the guidelines in journalists’ professional purpose, arguing: “...journalists should not simply, without question, adopt the guidelines. Journalists have a different social role to play than health professionals. Journalists may have to reject or modify the guidelines of experts.” Writer Alexandra Kimball (2013, June 27) for a *Random House Canada* blog, Melanie Coulson, a digital journalist for the *Ottawa Citizen* (2012, April 24) and Harrison Lowman (2013, May 8), an intern at *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, have also shared similar views. Even psychiatrist David Goldbloom, chair of the *Mental Health Commission of Canada*, expressed concerns about the validity of the guidelines (2012, December 12).

Media outlets and professionals also face myriad organizational and market pressures that complicate the implementation of guidelines, such as space constraints and rapid deadlines, lack of organizational guidance, the fact that suicide is and will remain newsworthy, and pressures to sell the most interesting and informative story in a competitive news market (Bohanna & Wang, 2012; McCurdy, 2011; Russell, 2006). Furthermore, a study by Pirkis et al. (2006b) called into question the relevance of certain guideline items by failing to find associations between, for example, media pieces that detailed suicide method and increased rates of suicide as compared to media pieces that excluded details of the method. Media pieces that displayed the suicide story more prominently also did not appear to correlate to an increase in suicide rates over stories that

followed the recommendation of these guideline items. Similar questions arose around the guideline item of providing a balanced portrayal of the person who has died (Pirkis et al., 2006b). The authors indicate that further investigation is needed (Pirkis et al., 2006b). Pirkis et al. (2006a) also note the importance of addressing the discrepancy in guideline acceptance and uptake, and argue that additional research into the effects of engaging media members in guideline creation and throughout the dissemination and implementation process is warranted.

Public Relations and Communication Management

Grunig and colleagues' excellence theory is one of the more significant contributions to the academic advancement of the public relations field (Laskin, 2012). The theory, in short, determines that the function of public relations is to manage the interdependency of organizations with their constituencies through the development of positive relationships (Grunig et al., 2002 p. 10, 140). Organizations that do this effectively, or those deemed 'excellent' by Grunig et al., use two-way symmetrical communication strategies to help establish the conditions necessary for engagement and dialogue that will foster positive relationships between organizations and particular constituencies (Grunig et al., 2002 p.140). Because outcomes for organizations are partially controlled by external players (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992), Grunig and colleagues (2002) find that two-way symmetrical communication with external players through research, dialogue and relationship-development can affect positive attitude, idea and behaviour change in both organizations and their publics (p. 307). Excellence theory also offers a description of constituencies most relevant to public relations practitioners, called publics, and describes four models of public relations communications that explain and predict public relations behaviour; these models include press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models (the models are described in detail in

the following subsections). Grunig and Hunt (1984) and later, Grunig and colleagues (Grunig, 1992; Grunig et al., 2002), determined that the fourth model of public relations, two-way symmetrical communication, is the model that best contributes to an organization's achievement of goals and social responsibility.

Publics in public relations. Publics in public relations campaigns are described by Grunig and Hunt (1984) as those groups emerging in response to the consequences of organizational behaviour, generally through the criteria of facing a similar problem, recognizing that a problem exists, and organizing to do something about the problem (p. 144). Publics require public relations interventions that increase in scale based on their categorization from latent (publics that have yet to become aware of issues), to aware (publics that are aware of issues but have yet to organize), to active (publics that are aware and have organized to confront an issue), along which publics become increasingly communicative (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 147-154). Publics become more communicative as their recognition and understanding of an issue increases, as their constraints or barriers to confronting a problem are lessened, and their level of involvement with the issue increases. Those publics with high problem recognition, low constraint recognition and a high level of involvement are most important to communicate with, as they present the greatest threats or potential supports to an organization's achievement of goals (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 157-158). The authors also state that these publics are more likely to alter their perceptions, attitudes and behaviours around an issue as a result of appropriate communication strategies. Only aware and active publics, they argue, are invested enough to develop reasoned cognitions and attitudes, and develop behaviour that reflects these attitudes (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 158).

Four models of public relations. Grunig and colleagues' four models of public relations aim to describe and predict practices across the diverse field of public relations, and offer a normative framework for effective public relations. Grunig and Grunig (1992) explain that the models are differentiated through the dimensions of direction and purpose; direction meaning the extent to which a communication strategy is one-way (i.e. with information flowing from one direction to another) or two-way (bidirectional information flow), and purpose, referring to whether a model is balanced asymmetrically (in favour of one party) or symmetrically (in favour of both parties) between organizations and publics. In asymmetrical models, organizations attempt to change publics while themselves remaining unchanged while in symmetrical models both make concessions to find a mutually beneficial solution (Grunig & Grunig 1992). The four models are press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical communication and two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Grunig, 1992).

Press agency/publicity is a one-way, asymmetrical model based on inflated truths and persuasion of audiences through propaganda and embellishment tactics, and is often equated with marketing and publicity. Laskin (2009) describes its uses as primarily in sport, entertainment and product promotion, and communication is predominantly unidirectional from organizations to mass publics. In this tradition, truth is not always necessary, as the primary goal is to get attention for the organization in any way possible (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Laskin, 2009).

The second model, public information, is also one-way and asymmetrical and emerged as corporations responded to negative press coverage by hiring writers tasked with sharing objective information about the organization. As Laskin (2009) notes, though truth is an important element, the public is informed largely of positive rather than negative truths

associated with organizations, with the intention of changing an organization's image and public attitudes toward the organization (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Communication strategies are not necessarily persuasive, but are meant to be objective (Grunig & Hunt, 1984 p. 22).

The third model, two-way asymmetrical communication, emerged after World War II and the behavioural research related to propaganda (Grunig & Grunig 1992; Laskin, 2009). Grunig and Grunig (1992) describe the model as two-way, since there is bidirectional information flow as public relations practitioners scan the environment seeking information about the motivations of publics and the messages or tactics most likely to elicit the organization's desired response from publics. However this model is asymmetrical, as this information is used strategically to manipulate publics towards the organization's goals and engineer consent while the organization remains unchanged (Grunig & Grunig, 1992).

The final model, two-way symmetrical communication, Grunig et al. (2002) argue, is the model that best serves organizational ethics and effectiveness in terms of a balance of goal attainment and social responsibility. Two-way symmetrical communication is defined by the use of interpersonal communication strategies such as face to face conversations (Rhee, 2007), active listening and flexibility in responding (Grunig et al., 2002 p. 123), dialogue, commitment to the fair representation of interests (Plowman, 2007), the development of shared understanding and common goals around issues (Botan & Taylor, 2004), and opportunities for collaboration and mutual influence (Childers, 1989; Grunig et al., 2002). Using quantitative relational measures, Stacks and Watson (2007) demonstrate that two-way symmetrical communication implicates an organization within its environment and uses research evidence to elicit feedback from this environment to develop a comprehensive understanding of publics so as to know how to best engage with them. The meaningful engagement of publics through research and dialogue

positively informs organizational processes, products and plans. In sum, through strategic research, planning and evaluation (Rhee, 2007, Stacks and Watson, 2007), two-way symmetrical communication facilitates dialogue and the development of positive relationships with strategic publics to shape favourable outcomes (Childers, 1989; Grunig et al., 2002; Laskin, 2009).

As Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, and Jones (2003) point out, Grunig's four models have been the dominant public relations paradigm for nearly thirty years. However, researchers have identified problems in the definition of the dimensions of the models and the measures used to assess them in practice. Murphy (1991) argues that public relations is not practiced either as pure cooperation (in symmetrical models) or as pure conflict (asymmetrical models). Rather, the author states, public relations is practiced as a mixed-motive model in the middle of the continuum between cooperation and conflict, wherein the task is to find equilibrium such that neither player would have any cause to regret their action (Murphy, 1991). Grunig (2001), however, refuted Murphy's claim by arguing that this is, in fact, how he had envisioned two-way symmetrical communication; not as pure cooperation or accommodation, but as two asymmetric and distinct points of view working towards a mutually beneficial agreement, or the "win/win zone" (p. 26). Leitchy and Springston (1993) also take issue with Grunig's assumption that organizations practice one of the four models across all contexts and time periods, arguing that as variability occurs, it is difficult to aggregate all practices under four dimensions (Leitchy & Springston, 1993). Laskin (2009) similarly finds that the dimensions and differentiation of Grunig's four models difficult to reconcile. If asymmetrical practices, the author argues, represent the organization's interests on one end of the continuum, how can symmetrical practices, representing both organizational interests and public interests, represent the other end? Dimensions of symmetry and asymmetry are therefore not dichotomous, and thus difficult to

differentiate (Laskin, 2009). Laskin (2012) rather proposes the dimensions be considered as scales to create a continuum upon which public relations practices can fall. Leitchy & Springston (1993) also identify several methodological issues with Grunig's measures, suggesting that the scales used to identify the use of the four models among public relations practitioners suffer from low reliability and validity. Though Grunig and his team attempted to address this criticism by using different measurement tools, Leitchy and Springston (1993) continued to be critical of the of the Grunig model.

While there is criticism surrounding Grunig's work, Laskin (2012) points out that few alternatives to the four models and two-way symmetrical communication have been soundly developed and/or tested in the public relations field. The literature also demonstrates a wide variety of contexts and fields in which the models have been successfully identified and applied. The following subsections in this chapter focus on one model, two-way symmetrical communication, and the ways in which the model cultivates the relationships necessary to achieve goals and increase social responsibility, as well as how it contributes to health communication practices.

Relationship development as a key factor in effectiveness. The function of public relations, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) note, is increasingly being defined as relationship management. Indeed, a wealth of public relations literature suggests that the development of organization-public relationships contributes to positive outcomes for both parties, and two-way symmetrical communication strategies lays the foundation for the positive relationships that lead to organizational effectiveness (Grunig & Hon, 1999).

Grunig and Hon (1999) state that effective organizations choose and achieve goals as a result of developing relationships with publics; organizations make better decisions when they

listen to and collaborate with stakeholders in the decision-making process rather than trying to persuade publics to accept decisions after the fact. Positive, constructive collaboration requires positive relationships. Drawing on interpersonal communication literature, the authors identify strategies for cultivating and maintaining good relationships, including increasing access, positivity, openness, assurance, networking and sharing of tasks. These cultivation strategies, the authors argue, can lead to positive outcomes such as control mutuality (the degree to which organizations agree on power structures in relationships), trust, satisfaction and commitment (Grunig & Hon, 1999). Following case study analysis of organizations dealing with activist groups, L. Grunig (1992) notes that excellent organizations understand that support and trust from publics do not develop overnight; time, commitment, accessibility and on-going personal contact are necessary to develop relationships that build trust.

In a study of telephone carrier clients, Ledingham & Bruning (1998) demonstrate that developing trust, involvement and commitment, and employing open, frank communication practices with particular clients by a telephone carrier established positive relationships and differentiated clients as willing to stay with this provider versus other clients who would not or were unsure (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). In this study, successful relationships engendered loyalty from publics and contributed to cost benefits in comparison to short-term symbolic organizational activities aimed at enhancing image.

In a study of how to cultivate quality relationship, Hung (2007) conducted qualitative interviews with CEOs, vice-presidents and public relations managers from 36 Asian companies, and arrived at similar conclusions to those of Ledingham and Bruning (1998). The author suggests that organizations that try to cultivate “win-win” relationships with publics (i.e. of mutual benefit to organizations and publics), are more willing to engage in dialogue, listen to publics, treat

publics as “partners,” give positive feedback to publics and be constructive in exchanges (Hung, 2007). Two-way and symmetrical communication dimensions, Hung (2007) demonstrates, nurture quality relationships.

Rhee (2007) compared the impact of face-to-face communication versus mediated communication (i.e. filtered through the media), and her study also supports Grunig and Hon’s (1999) assertions of the use of two-way symmetrical strategies to cultivate relationships. Through interview research, the author demonstrates that face-to-face communication and one-on-one dialogue increases public awareness of organizational activities, leads constituents to pay more attention to organizations, puts a face on organizations and reduces negative public perceptions (Rhee, 2007). Rhee (2007) suggests that two-way symmetrical communication is more likely to employ unmediated communication techniques than one-way asymmetrical communication strategies, and therefore is more likely than other public relations models to produce the relationship dimensions of access, positivity, openness, assurance and sharing of tasks that lead to positive relationship outcomes for both organizations and publics. The author concludes that interpersonal communication is an element of symmetrical communication (Rhee, 2007).

Two-way symmetrical communication and organizational effectiveness. Grunig et al. (2002) argue that two-way symmetrical communication contributes to organizational effectiveness by having organizations “maximize their autonomy by giving some of it up to build relationships” (p. 10). Grunig, Grunig, and Ehling (1992) explain that, according to organizational behaviour theory, organizations want to increase their autonomy to pursue and achieve goals free from internal and external pressures that could constrain this pursuit. However, this is unrealistic as organizations are systems within environments that are subject to

environmental threats and instability (Grunig & White, 1992). Based on this assumption, Grunig and Repper (1992) state that organizations must maximize their ability to pursue and achieve goals by strategically managing their interdependence with other systems within the environment, both identifying threats and supports and adapting to them.

Public relations and, in particular, two-way symmetrical communication, act as a means of managing this interdependence and increasing the ability of organizations to pursue goals (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 10). Two-way symmetrical communication facilitates dialogue to understand threats and supports, to listen to and understand publics' interests and develop responses, strategies and goals that reflect both sets of priorities (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 14). Childers (1989) notes that through two-way symmetrical communication, organizations are able to develop relationships that effect positive cognitive changes in publics towards an organization, and in the long run, relationships that lead to behavioural outcomes such as supporting or failing to oppose organizations. One-way and asymmetrical models, Childers (1989) argues, may produce powerful short-term changes, but these changes may not be sustainable.

Murphy (1991) uses game theory to argue against the practical nature of two-way symmetrical communication, stating that, in reality, public relations practitioners and publics represent their own interests and interact on a continuum from pure conflict to pure cooperation. Two-way symmetrical communication falls on the side of pure cooperation, and is from this perspective actually inefficient, because in accommodating to find mutually beneficial solutions, neither side actually gets what it wants. Laskin (2012) states that the emphasis on two-way symmetrical communication as normative also reduces the value of much of the field of public relations practice, as Grunig's studies suggest that most public relations is practiced asymmetrically and by extension, unethically and ineffectively. Furthermore, Grunig et al. (2002,

p. 312) and Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 43) concede that two-way symmetrical communication is not always effective. There are contexts in which two-way symmetrical communication is not appropriate, and there are limits to collaboration such as incentives and disincentives, historical and ideological barriers, disparities in power, societal dynamics and political and institutional barriers that may make communication unsuccessful. However, the authors argue that evidence linking two-way symmetrical communication and effectiveness is heartening as it increases the likelihood for dialogue and collaboration (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 322).

Organizational effectiveness and goal attainment. Moreover, researchers have demonstrated that two-way symmetrical communication contributes to organizational effectiveness in terms of goal attainment, dealing with activists and managing crisis situations. The longitudinal study that generated the excellence theory completed by Grunig and colleagues (2002) involved surveying and interviewing public relations practitioners over a period of ten years in three countries. Grunig and Repper (1992) concluded that excellent communications departments contribute to the attainment of a wide variety of goals by creating conditions with publics that lead them to exhibit more support for an organization and its policies and products, and to consent to behaviour change recommended by organizations (such as health behaviour or voting behaviour). The conditions also elicit secondary support from other publics as a result of positive perceptions. These secondary publics may also oppose organizational behaviour less frequently than other publics who have not been a part of two-way symmetrical communication engagement (Childers, 1989). Financially, interviews with managers in the study suggest that two-way symmetrical communication reduces costs for organizations by heading off expensive processes such as labour strikes, government interventions, failure of campaigns or products, and lawsuits and other litigation (Grunig et al., 2002, p.104).

Grunig et al. (2002, p. 100) also note that two-way symmetrical communication can elicit secondary outcomes, including increased awareness and information about the environment and publics, identification of new opportunities, increased social responsibility, public satisfaction and contribution to public policy activities. Research for the excellence theory study also demonstrates that two-way symmetrical communication contributes to more fair and balanced portrayals of the organization in media reports (Grunig & Grunig, 1992), and organizations also cite less of a need to engage with the media to defend themselves when using two-way symmetrical strategies with publics (Grunig & Repper, 1992). In a survey of Taiwanese publics, Huang (2004) found the use of two-way symmetrical practices positively contributed to various outcomes of importance to the groups surveyed. Organizations reported increased market performance, organizational effectiveness and favourable media exposure, while community members dealing with the development of a nuclear power facility and Taiwanese legislators responded positively to conflict resolution and crisis management strategies using the two-way symmetrical approach.

Kelly and Laskin (2010) also determined that the two-way symmetrical communication model is essential for goal attainment in investor relations, and consequently contributes to an organization's financial bottom line. When practiced effectively, the authors posit, investor relations is inherently two-way and symmetrical; practitioners must recognize and respond to the needs of investors and facilitate understanding and positive relationships between organizations, the financial press, investors and those who guide investors in decision making.

Organizational effectiveness, goal attainment and activism. Interviews and comparative case study research suggest that two-way symmetrical communication strategies can be effective for organizations when facing public activism. L. Grunig (1992) defines activists as

“groups of two or more individuals who organize to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics or force” (p. 504). Following a study of 34 cases of activist groups and their interactions with organizations, the author concludes that the use of press agency, public information and two-way asymmetrical communication strategies are less effective in reaching solutions with activist groups than are two-way symmetrical approaches. While L. Grunig (1992) did not find any cases of activist groups being appeased through communication strategies that were explicitly two-way and symmetrical, the cases stressed the importance of being open and honest about organizational activities, including engaging publics in strategy development and ensuring opportunities for real communication and mutual influence when dealing with activist groups.

Cooper (2009) similarly found that two-way symmetrical communication practices by McDonald’s and Unilever were successful in dealing with the environmental activist group Greenpeace, whereas the use of asymmetrical strategies by Cargill on the same issues led to negative outcomes for that organization. On issues related to farming in Brazil and palm oil production in Indonesia, McDonald’s and Unilever were able to negotiate win-win outcomes with Greenpeace by inviting the activist group to the table for discussions, being open and honest about the organizational constraints they face, and working with Greenpeace to change their business practices towards ethical and sustainable models that were satisfactory for both parties. Cooper (2009) cites examples of McDonald’s using the opportunity to overhaul its image, recently damaged by documentaries such as *Fast Food Nation* and *Supersize Me*, to become healthier and more environmentally friendly, and of Unilever being branded internationally as an environmentally friendly company with a commitment to sustainability.

In contrast, Cooper (2009) found that Cargill, a supply company of McDonald's, went on the defensive when facing Greenpeace, refusing to engage in discussion, using only one-way media interviews to share information, and approaching communication with Greenpeace from an asymmetrical worldview by refusing to alter their practices in any meaningful way. In failing to communicate and engage effectively through two-way symmetrical practices, Cargill was left with a damaged reputation and ultimately suffered financially as farming bans were placed upon the company and McDonald's cut ties with them (Cooper, 2009). Two-way symmetrical practices also allowed the organizations to push for their own interests rather than completely accommodating Greenpeace. For example, while Unilever refused to accommodate Greenpeace's demands to have the organization stop buying palm oil from certain Indonesian suppliers, Unilever was able to negotiate a plan to force the suppliers to restructure their practices without having to cut ties. In sum, the organizations were able to get more of what they want by giving up some of their autonomy to meaningfully engage with publics (Grunig et al., 2002 p. 10).

In a study of the outcomes of a university's handling of activist groups rallying against the university, Leeper and Leeper (2006) determined that the eventual use of two-way symmetrical practices allowed the university to recover its reputation as a contributing community member and avoid major financial repercussions. Specifically, the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMCK) wanted to demolish local housing to expand their sports facilities at the expense of local community. However, the university failed to communicate or engage with the community about their plans, choosing instead to share information uni-directionally through the media. A community activist group formed as a result and created negative media attention for UMKC in the community, throughout the city and eventually at the state level,

ultimately forcing a resolution of no confidence against top-level university leaders, the resignation of the vice-chancellor, and the possibility of lower university enrollment as the activists discouraged applicants. In a bid to mitigate some of these issues, UMKC engaged in dialogue with the activists and the wider community, which allowed the university to understand the negative impact of their expansion plan on the community. While UMKC had to give up on its initial plans, administrators were able to recover their reputation and create stronger community ties through the establishment of the Office for Community and Public Affairs. In comparison, Leeper and Leeper (2006) note that another college in the same community was successful in its expansion plans, possibly due to their yearlong negotiations with the community prior to action.

Organizational effectiveness, goal attainment and crisis management. Two-way symmetrical communication strategies are similarly effective in helping organizations manage crisis situations. Larsson and Nohrstedt (2002) compared two crisis situations facing Scandinavian governments--a nightclub fire and a ferry sinking--both of which resulted in significant loss of life, and determined that the outcomes from the incidents differed as a result of the type of communication strategies used by the responding governments. After the nightclub fire, government agencies worked with sub-agencies, local organizations and community members to understand the needs of the situation, and as a result were highly sensitive and flexible in their response. Information was kept flowing, agency officials were consistently available and communicative, and the needs of the bereaved were identified and responded to. The government was ultimately praised for its collaborative response to the crisis and viewed as taking the matter seriously. Conversely, government agencies managing the aftermath of the ferry sinking were perceived as disorganized, uncommunicative, and failed to engage with the

families of the ferry victims. These outcomes illustrate that one-way and asymmetrical communication strategies lack sufficient understanding of public needs, and as they fail to research or scan the environment, they cannot respond to issues in a constructive manner. Community reaction to the government's handling of the situation was overwhelmingly negative, and the media portrayed government agencies as shielding themselves from blame and insensitive to the victims' families. Larsson and Nohrstedt (2002) note that the use of two-way symmetrical strategies including reading the environment, engaging in dialogue, responding to environmental need and working closely with strategic publics as valuable partners ensured that the nightclub fire incident did not escalate into a crisis with long-term consequences, such as negative image and public distrust.

In a study of mediated versus unmediated communication outcomes, Rhee (2007) provides an analysis of the perceptions of community members of the communication strategies used by a chemical research laboratory in responding to the crisis of the discovery of radioactive particles in ground water underneath the lab. The lab established a community outreach program comprised of local activists, civic associations and lab employees, and this representative forum ensured that face-to-face and one-on-one dialogue would facilitate understanding of community concerns and needs. The lab was able to turn an initially hostile response from the community into one of respect. Rhee (2007) infers that two-way symmetrical communication model is most likely to facilitate mediated communications over one-way and asymmetrical models.

Two-way symmetrical communication and organizational ethics. In addition to aiding in relationship development, organizational effectiveness and goal attainment, two-way symmetrical communication contributes to an organization's social responsibility, which acts as a catalyst for organizational effectiveness (Grunig et al., 2002 p. 122). Foster and Jonker (2005)

argue that publics are not just passive recipients of communication, but are essential players in sense-making. In asymmetrical practices, there is no chance of reciprocal communication for drawing out public perceptions of sense, and the voices of publics are stifled as public relations is used as a way of getting organizations what they want without changing their behaviour or compromising their position (Grunig & White, 1992). Such practices, Grunig and White (1992) argue, are inherently unethical as they presuppose that an organization knows best and does not need to change. They also assume that it is in a public's benefit to cooperate. Two-way symmetrical practices, on the other hand, view publics as powerful players with interests and 'senses' that bear upon organizational goal attainment. Two-way symmetrical communication increases an organization's ability to understand and respond to public interests through dialogue and relationship development. Botan and Taylor (2004) identify the two-way symmetrical communication model as the model that most prominently features the integration of public values for the 'co-creation' of sense, or meaning. As organizations act in publics' interest, they increase their public responsibility by incorporating public meaning into their work (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 22). Furthermore, facilitation of dialogue through the two-way model, Grunig et al. (2002) argue, increases the ethical nature of strategic planning and decision-making, as greater understanding of the ethical dimensions of issues and interests can be made explicit (p. 306). Neither side can know which position is more reasonable or more moral without engaging in dialogue (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 316).

In contrast, Murphy (1991) argues that the two-way symmetrical model is actually unethical as players are focused on maintaining the status quo, and innovation is discouraged as both sides give in to the other; new ideas and fresh perspectives Murphy (1991) states, are essential in breaking ground over existing structures that may place one party in a position of

power over another. Roper (2005) similarly questions the ethical nature of two-way symmetrical communication by positioning it as a method of maintaining strategic hegemony rather than integrating into the environment. As organizations accommodate publics at strategic areas of contestation, Roper (2005) notes, they are working to maintain a position of power that they may not morally deserve, regardless of concessions in the interest of mutual benefit and public good. An analysis by Stoker and Tusinski-Berg (2006) finds a problem with too much dialogue and cooperation in terms of ethics. The author argues that dialogue and cooperation can reduce the value of distinct ideas and perspectives and can 'water down' morality, as constant negotiation towards a 'win-win zone' may ultimately make the outcome less ethical than it could have been if one side had maintained their position (Stoker & Tusinski-Berg, 2006).

However, in the excellence theory study, Grunig et al. (2002) conclude that public relations strategies practiced within the two-way symmetrical model led to decisions that were more ethical, as communication strategies do not reflect the assumption that organizations know best, and they work the values and interests of stakeholders into strategic decisions. This ethical dimension, as Grunig and Hon (1999) demonstrate, contributes to effectiveness, as organizations are able to make decisions that engender more support and loyalty from publics. Huang (2004) also found it difficult to separate out definitions for ethical communication and two-way symmetrical communication in her study's survey, suggesting the two concepts are closely intertwined and that Grunig's assertion that communications will be ethical if it is practiced symmetrically may be correct.

Two-way symmetrical communication and health communication. Health communication strategies are built largely around theories that seek to explain how individuals and populations interpret and act upon health information (Shiavo, 2007). Using understanding

of human decision-making and behaviour change, the aim of health communication is to identify the messages and networks that will be most effective in persuading publics to alter their behaviour to achieve desirable health outcomes (Schiavo, 2007). Similarly, research in knowledge translation aims to address the weak link between research and application by increasing understanding of the targeted users of health research and developing strategies to reach these users most effectively (Colcannon et al., 2012). Like the two-way symmetrical communication model, knowledge translation models encourage the use of strong communication skills and the development of positive relationships to ensure research is usable (Moffat, 2007). Successfully engaged users, these models find, can be powerful advocates for an organization's policy, can speed up attitude or behaviour change, and can reduce negative perceptions that might influence adoption of recommendations, practices or policies (Graham et al., 2006). However, articles by Guttman and Thompson (2011), Mahoney (2010) and Murturi (2005) argue that these strategies are largely one-way, such as the use of promotional campaigns or information delivered to patients through doctors, and asymmetrical, in that they are seeking to understand the end user in order to engineer behaviour change with the assumption that the health behaviour is of benefit to the user. The authors also argue that the use of two-way symmetrical communication strategies can be effective in better understanding the information and communication needs of audiences, and therefore in designing health campaigns and strategies for mobilizing research that engage and respect their publics.

From a theoretical perspective, Guttman and Thompson (2011) argue that health communication practitioners often fail to consider their own biases and social status when developing campaigns, and many result in Western, patriarchal or individualistic health messages that may not reflect the information needs of the intended audience. Further, the

authors suggest that the presumed benevolence of the communication intervention obscures many ethical issues that may be inherent to the messages communicated. Guttman and Thompson (2011) identify other ethical issues such as financial biases and pushing the notion of “responsibility” in health management, which employs “blaming and shaming” tactics instead of empowering. Publics, they argue, must be “enlisted as partners in discourse on complex topics” (p. 305) to avoid ethical gaps between health communication practitioners and their audiences (Guttman & Thompson, 2011).

In addition to increasing the ethical dimensions of health communication, studies in health communication suggest that the use of two-way symmetrical communication strategies can be influential in understanding audiences and developing strategic and effective campaigns. In a study of the effectiveness of anti-smoking campaigns on Australian youth, for example, Mahoney (2010) concluded that the one-way asymmetrical strategies of communicating anti-smoking messages, including mass media campaigns and school health curricula, are ineffective and, in fact, while adult rates in Australia are on the decline these strategies may play a role in *increasing* the rate of youth smoking. The author argues that two-way symmetrical communication strategies could better serve youth anti-smoking promotion through developing a better understanding of young peoples’ information needs and information processing patterns.

In a study of HIV/AIDS reduction campaigns in Kenya, Murturi (2005) concluded that one-way, asymmetrical strategies, such as mass media campaigns and entertainment education, do not address some of the barriers Kenyans face in living healthy lifestyles related to HIV/AIDS prevention. Murturi (2005) used two-way symmetrical communication strategies to engage Kenyans in meaningful discussions on an equal playing field about the barriers to acting on the knowledge they have about reducing HIV/AIDS transmission and what strategies they think

would be most effective in raising awareness. The author's interviews and focus groups offered opportunities for participants to comment on the messages they receive and share their frustrations or concerns with regards to acting on them. In one example, while participants stated that they understood the messages in the campaigns, they shared that, for example, they did not want to seek medical help because of nurses' and doctors' judgment, making it difficult to manage the disease (Murturi, 2005). Muturi (2005) found that building relationships with the intended audiences of HIV/AIDS campaigns was essential in drawing out the root causes of social structures and beliefs that can inhibit long-term behaviour change, and concluded that effective health campaigns must include researching appropriate methodologies for understanding and building positive relationships with audiences.

Research Rationale

Two-way symmetrical communication facilitates the development of relationships that allow organizations to better understand and respond to the needs of their publics. By engaging in dialogue and working collaboratively, organizations and publics can identify mutually-beneficial solutions and, with these in mind, organizations can develop products, services, policies and strategies that publics will support or, at least, fail to oppose. Grunig & Hon (1999) indicate that decisions made in consultation with publics are more likely to elicit support than those decisions that must be defended after the fact, echoing Russell (2006, p. 234) and Bohanna and Wang (2012) in regards to media codes of ethics. Such outcomes have been observed in multiple fields, and are increasingly being seen in health communication situations, where public relations models have been used to develop clearer understanding of audiences, more ethical campaigns, and messages based on information processing and learning needs of intended audiences (Mahoney, 2010; Muturi, 2005). While two-way symmetrical communication research

is normally approached from the perspective of the organization, as Rhee's (2007) study suggests, insights into two-way symmetrical communication strategies can also be approached from the perspective of intended publics, as the author demonstrates in interviews with community members about their perceptions of the nuclear laboratory's communication strategies (Rhee, 2007).

As for suicide reporting guidelines specifically, research in Australia, Austria, the United Kingdom and New Zealand indicate that engagement in dialogue and the development of relationships for co-creation, education, implementation and ongoing support increases the likelihood of media professionals accepting and using suicide reporting guidelines (Pirkis et al., 2006a). Indeed, Pirkis, Blood, Skehan, and Dare (2010) suggest that the Australian model, including the Mindframe Media Partnership and the on-going education, training and consultation, is exemplary in communicating suicide reporting guidelines and supporting behaviour change in journalists. Given the level of variability in guideline acceptance and use across the globe, Pirkis et al. (2006a) state that more research is needed to understand the factors that influence this variability, including whether engagement of the media in the development and communication of suicide reporting guidelines is a factor. In Canada, current media conversations suggest that Canadian journalists, like in New Zealand, are similarly wary of using suicide reporting guidelines. As a group, or public, affected by the products of the health organizations (the guidelines), excellence theory argues that journalists should be communicated with via two-way symmetrical communication strategies that value them as partners in developing the guidelines (Grunig et al., 2002). The two-way symmetrical communication literature demonstrates that the use of strategic communications grounded in principles such as engagement in dialogue, commitment to mutual influence and the development of positive

relationships can create the conditions necessary to increase public support, reduce public opposition and create long-term behaviour change (Childers, 1989; Grunig, 2001; Grunig & White, 1992).

Using the two-way symmetrical communication model as a normative framework, this study will examine whether engagement in developing, learning about and using the guidelines influences journalists' attitudes towards them, as excellence theory suggests it should. As Pirkis et al. (2006a) maintain, little is currently known about the factors that influence journalists to use the suicide reporting guidelines or to ignore them; this study aims to illuminate some of the factors that may play into media professionals' decisions in the context of their own experiences and in their profession more broadly. The use of the public relations model in the context of a health communication issue will also contribute to the practicality of the application of the two-way symmetrical communication model in the context of health communication.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The following chapter will outline the methodological processes employed to collect and analyze data related to the study's research questions. More specifically, the chapter will provide a rationale for the choice of the research approach, outline the sampling strategy, justify the use of the semi-structured interview and detail the thematic analysis process.

Research Approach

The study addressed the subject matter through a phenomenological approach since it explores “the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell, 2009). This approach is appropriate for this study, as the aim is to understand the phenomena of suicide contagion, cross-profession communication and ethics and norms in journalism through the lens of media professionals' perspectives towards and experiences working with the suicide reporting guidelines. This is an issue that is understudied in the literature and thus merits attention.

The phenomenological approach is rooted in Husserl's concern that “the scientific method, appropriate for the study of physical phenomenon, is inappropriate for the study of human thought and action” (as cited in Mayan, 2009, p. 49). Developed further by philosophers such as Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, this analysis into human consciousness, experience, life-world and action seeks to understand meaning and comprehension through description by subjective actors (Hitzler & Eberle, 2004; Kvale, 1996). By analyzing individual narratives of lived experiences and related subjective perspectives, phenomenological research can uncover trends across groups of individuals, which can be used to draw out patterns of meaning (Creswell, 2009). Unlike an ethnographic or psychoanalytic position, the phenomenological approach is best suited to particular populations and particular experiences, as

its focus is on aggregating experiences of a specific phenomenon rather than focusing on an in-depth analysis of the meaning of everyday experiences, or of cultural or social structures (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). Phenomenological research also values the subjectivity and personal interpretations of individual experiences (Lester, 1999), which is central to qualitative approaches. Such research “is particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions” (Lester, 1999). It is through the subjective nature of participant narratives and reports that, as Mayan (2009) points out, “a thick description of the meaning, or essence, or the phenomenon, or lived experience” is created. This is the aim of phenomenological research.

Sampling Strategy and Participants

Sampling in qualitative research is not an exact science. Rather it is determined by a multitude of factors including the type of research approach, availability and access to participants, time and financial constraints, and the point at which there is little new information to contribute to a study. As Polkinghorne (2005) argues, “participants and documents for a qualitative study are not selected because they fulfill the representative requirements of statistical inference but because they can provide substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation” (p. 139). This thesis used a non-random snowball sampling/response-driven sampling (SSRD) strategy in order to recruit participants from a hard-to-reach population (Goodman, 2011) that had experience with the phenomenon of study. Such populations are groups in which it is difficult, impractical or expensive to apply a standard sampling approach (Handcock & Gile, 2011). Traditional snowball sampling involves asking group members to identify other group members, who are then asked to identify further

group members for study so as to examine the relationships between those who have identified and those who have been identified (Goodman, 2011). Handcock and Gile (2010) argue that response-driven sampling is a modern variation of snowball sampling that creates a sampling frame within hard-to-reach populations where it would otherwise be impossible to identify potential participants.

While the thesis aimed to be purposive in sampling, in several instances it became of convenience type (Goodman, 2011). Though Polkinghorne (2005) argues that convenience sampling reduces the likelihood of finding perspectives that enhance the depth and breadth of understanding, the research had to consider time and resource limitations to finding participants with any experience related to the phenomenon of study, as well as an interest in being interviewed. Fortunately, those interviewed all had direct experience with the phenomenon in some form or another, contributing to the diversity of perspectives. In this case, the inclusion criteria for the sample was limited to individuals working in news media as either a journalist or an editor and having had experience reporting suicide or working with suicide reporting guidelines. SSRD sampling allowed for internal access to a group often inundated by emails and other communiqués; several participants expressly stated that it lent credibility to the recruitment to see the name of a colleague who had referred the participant in a recruitment email.

While the strategy facilitated access to the study sample, SSRD sampling can lead to bias in the types of individuals studied and in the responses received, further reducing generalizability. However, generalizability is not always the intent of qualitative research, much less phenomenological research (Creswell, 2009). Mayan (2009) argues that bias in qualitative research is actually a strength, as the aim is to understand a particular phenomenon in depth.

The first participants were identified through a Google search for Canadian news articles

and reporters referring to suicide, and more specifically, to the suicide reporting guidelines. Individuals with prominent suicide stories were contacted in the first round of recruitment. Following interviews, participants were asked if they could identify anyone else who might be relevant to the study, and were asked if the use of their name in contacting additional participants was permitted. All participants agreed to this, and subsequent rounds of recruiting were conducted.

Sample size in qualitative research is a much-debated topic; there is rarely a specific number, the size depending largely on the topic of inquiry and access to participants (Rowley, 2012). Most qualitative literature, however, stresses the importance of recognizing data saturation, i.e. when no new themes or ideas are emerging, and using this as a measure of when to stop collecting data (Mayan, 2009). As a rule of thumb, Rowley (2012) suggest that novice researchers should aim for approximately twelve 30-minute interviews, which aligns with similar studies in this topic area (Collings & Kemp, 2010; Tully & Elsaka, 2004) who found that data saturation occurred between 10 and 15 interviews. Consistent with these recommendations, in this study 13 individuals were contacted, and a total of eleven interviews were completed between January 2014 and March 2014 with eight active journalists and three media editors from radio, television and print media. Three women and eight men from a total of four media organizations were interviewed, from both private and public news organizations treating print, broadcast and online news media. Participants were located in four cities, including Ottawa, Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, Montreal, Quebec, and St. John's, Newfoundland. Participants reported working in their current positions between 1 and 27 years, and reported working in the field of journalism between the range of 7 and 40 years. While three participants shared that they had not in fact heard of the Canadian Psychiatric Association's suicide reporting guidelines,

these interviews were retained in the dataset to underscore the varying perspectives and understanding related to the topic. The difference in attitudes and perspectives held by this group of participants compared to the others, however, was outside the scope of this study.

Data Collection Procedures

The study used semi-structured interviews to discuss participants' experiences with, and perspectives towards, reporting suicide and working with suicide reporting guidelines. The purpose of the semi-structured interview, Kvale (1996) suggests, is "to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting meaning of the described phenomenon" (pp. 5-6). Unlike structured interviews and questionnaires, which gather surface data, semi-structured interviews can delve under the surface and expose layers in experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). The semi-structured interview format was appropriate in this context as it allowed the conversation to be framed by the topic of study and the theoretical approach (Flick, 2002) while providing participants with the flexibility to guide the sequence and form of questions (Kvale, 1996). This flexibility allowed subjective perspectives to emerge while ensuring the appropriate information was collected (Kvale, 1996). It also ensured relevant discussions, as the interview necessitated that participants had some degree of knowledge about the topic, while retaining flexibility in subject matter (Flick, 2002).

The major thematic interview questions (Appendix B) (Bonneville, Grosjean, & Lagacé 2007) were developed out of the study's theoretical location, as were questions regarding attitudes, opinions and communication processes. However, participants were free to explore different aspects of each question in order to better reflect their individual experiences and perceptions. Additional questions that emerged from the interviews were noted afterwards. The interview guide was developed following Creswell's (2009) interview protocol and was vetted

by the thesis supervisor to ensure the relevancy, accuracy and clarity of questions (Bonneville et al., 2007). Rowley (2012) recommends working with six to twelve strategic, clearly worded questions with sub-questions and prompts that are flexible enough to allow for multiple answers; the interview guide consisted of thirteen questions with sub-questions. The interview guide, recruitment letter and study consent forms were approved by the University of Ottawa Office of Research Ethics and Integrity prior to beginning recruitment.

Potential participants were contacted via email with an initial recruitment letter. If individuals agreed to be interviewed, this initial email was followed up by an email containing the interview questions and the study consent form. While several participants were local, and thus could have been interviewed in person, telephone interviews were conducted with all participants to ensure comparability across interviews, as some research suggests different modalities can affect interview protocols and outcomes (Shuy, 2002). While other researchers argue that the richness and depth of face to face interactions may be lost over the phone (Bryman, 2001 as cited in Rowley, 2012), phone interviews allowed for the option of working with participants outside of Ottawa as well as the flexibility to conduct interviews at any time within participants' busy schedules. Interviews were recorded after verbal consent was obtained from participants, and lasted between 20 and 45 minutes, after which they were transcribed verbatim by the researcher to reduce the incidence of misrepresentation or misinterpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Participants were offered the option of reviewing the transcript following the interview to ensure their perspectives had been accurately reflected as a means of increasing the credibility of the data through member-checking (Creswell, 2009), however only one participant was interested in reviewing their interview transcript. The process was iterative; that is, participant recruitment remained open throughout the study (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Data Analysis

The purpose of qualitative interpretation is to reveal, uncover and/or contextualize statements, and to reduce original texts to meaningful paraphrase through the categorization process (Flick, 2002). In this study, interview data was analyzed using the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis model, wherein the authors bring clarity to a “poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method” (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in six phases. Thematic analysis is used as a means to identify, analyze and report patterns within data to ultimately develop a rich description of phenomena across a dataset, which, the authors argue, is useful in under-researched topic areas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can be approached through an essentialist/realist lens using that aims to report on experiences, meanings and realities that have been shared by participants. This lens employs what Braun and Clarke (2006) call a semantic interpretation that describes and reports lived experiences from the participants’ perspective. Thematic analysis can also be conducted under a constructivist or contextualist method, which looks more deeply at the social and cultural discourses that shape experiences and meaning. These methods employ primarily latent interpretation, which examines underlying assumptions and ideologies. This study used the essentialist/realist lens and semantic interpretation, as these approaches fit squarely with the aim of phenomenological research. Thematic analysis is also an appropriate fit for this study as it allows the researcher the flexibility to approach data inductively or deductively from theory or research questions, both of which were applied in this context. Following a week of training, the researcher used NVivo10 qualitative analysis software to conduct the analysis and ensure data was organized and easily referred to.

In the first phase, thematic analysis began with a general pre-read of the data to get a

sense of what participants were saying, what the tone of the interviews were, and what was interesting or notable about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Preliminary thoughts and ideas were noted throughout the pre-read to form the foundation of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An additional pre-read was done, as Schmidt (2004) suggests, by scanning interviews with the theory and research questions in mind. Relevant passages or quotes were coded in NVivo10 as a list of general ideas.

In phase two, following a familiarization with the data and listing of general ideas, ideas were refined into a list of 59 codes to be used as the coding guide (Appendix C) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Creswell (2009) advises searching for material that addresses issues readers would expect to find, as well as surprising or unanticipated codes, unusual or conceptually interesting points and items that address larger theoretical questions. Bogdan and Biklen (1992, as cited in Creswell, 2009) suggest highlighting content that alludes to setting and context, perspectives held by participants, participants' ways of thinking, processes, activities, relationships, and more. With these ideas in mind, coding was conducted line by line, with data items pulled out in context and sorted into as many codes as possible, including additional codes that might represent new ideas.

In phase three, the codes were rearranged into five themes in NVivo10, which Braun and Clarke (2006) define as “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). In choosing themes, the analysis considered issues of overall prevalence, particular instances, and the weight, relevancy and originality of perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of NVivo10 at this stage allowed the researcher to retain the original codes and coded data items therein so as to continually ensure the larger themes represented the original data. An audit trail

of the coding and refining process was also maintained through this process. NVivo10 also facilitated the iterative process of data analysis by allowing the researcher to move seamlessly from the original interviews to the emerging themes to ensure the core messages were not lost in translation.

Phase four consisted of refining themes by ensuring themes represented coherent patterns and by doing a re-read of the interviews to make sure the generated themes still reflected the data. Themes were also refined in terms of what Patton (1990, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006) calls internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity; inclusive within themselves and explicitly distinct from one another to reduce overlapping or blending of themes. Ultimately, five themes with two to four subthemes each were created based on these criteria.

In the fifth phase, themes were named and the essence of each theme was identified. These essences were then structured into a story about the data, which was then elaborated upon in the sixth phase, reporting on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Much like the data collection and sampling process, the development of the coding scheme and major themes was iterative; analysis moved continually between the dataset, the coding scheme and the themes to ensure consistent interpretation of codes and themes and that the themes continued to accurately reflect the what participants shared (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Establishing the Trustworthiness of the Study

Qualitative research is often accused of a lack of objectivity and bias in its methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006), however many qualitative researchers maintain that the language of scientific rigour, i.e. reliability, validity and generalizability, are not appropriate in the context of naturalistic inquiry (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the concept of trustworthiness of data to establish qualitative integrity and competence, or a qualitative version

of ‘rigour.’ Trustworthiness includes displaying credibility (the fit between respondent views and researcher interpretations of them), transferability (generalizability of inquiry across cases), dependability (logical documentation and tracing of the method) and confirmability (that interpretations are clearly derived from data and not made up) (as cited in Tobin & Begley, 2004). Creswell (2013, pp. 250-253) suggests that these criteria can be achieved through a process of member checking, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation and audit trails. In the current study, the researcher ensured trustworthiness by attempting member checking (though only one research participant was interested and made only minor phrasing-related revisions to the interview transcript), debriefing with the thesis supervisor throughout the study in regards to theory, methods, results and analysis, and keeping an audit trail of the movement between interview data, thematic analysis and general discussion using NVivo10 qualitative analysis software. In phenomenological inquiry, experts also suggest the use of bracketing or Epoche (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34) in order to set aside personal experiences or biases and understand and report participant meanings as they are given, rather than through the researcher’s lens. The aim is to see everything with fresh vision “as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). While it is nearly impossible for the researcher to set aside preconceptions related to the topic, it is an essential practice to avoid skewing or colouring what participants are saying. In this study, interview questions were framed in a neutral manner, and bias in questions was considered in their wording. Throughout the analysis, the researcher continued to reflect upon the differences between knowledge gained in the literature review and knowledge gained from interviews to ensure that the analysis was not clouded by what has already been reported and learned (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

Chapter Four: Results

The following chapter describes the themes that emerged from the eleven semi-structured interviews. Using the thematic analysis method, five major themes were identified: media culture, media learning, decision-making and suicide reporting, change in social landscape, and media responsibility. This chapter describes each theme and elaborates on the sub-themes identified within. In order to honour the confidentiality of interviewees, participants are identified as J# and E#, referring to journalists and editors, respectively.

Theme 1. Media Culture

Participants described the professional culture of media and shared their attitudes regarding the alignment or fit of suicide reporting guidelines with practical realities and values of this media culture. These practical realities related to the everyday task of reporting news, and the values as those held by active journalists and editors that shape the ways in which they approach stories and interpret or apply suicide reporting guidelines.

Sub-theme 1: Practical realities of media. In interviews, participants described many aspects of the practice of reporting news and working in the professional media environment. They reflected upon how these realities affect their ability to use suicide reporting guidelines or influence the ways in which the profession approaches mental health and suicide. Examples of these realities included the fast-pace of media and working on a deadline, the physical considerations of a story, the importance of visuals in media, the pressures to publish and to publish first, as well as the responsive, immediate nature of media. Overall, respondents felt that some guideline items were applicable in light of these realities, while others felt that guidelines did not take these issues into account, and that these realities act as a barrier to using the guidelines.

In discussing applicability more generally, participant J2 stated: “I guess my criticism of those guidelines is that you can’t offend the basic tenets of journalism and expect people to follow those guidelines.” This reference to the basic tenets of journalism, such as speaking freely and plainly and responding to news as it happens, was reflected by several other participants, who shared the belief that a greater understanding of media realities on the part of the health professionals touting the guidelines would be beneficial in developing relevant and useable information. Participant E1 shared this thought:

E1: ...it seems to me that would be kind of critical to understand how the media views these things, to understand why we publish and why we don’t. And to have some kind of input [in guideline development] might have helped in the promulgation of these rules or guidelines in that way so that people a) know that they exist and b) don’t find them a suppression of their right to freedom of speech, freedom of press, that sort of thing.

Participants further suggested that this lack of media input in the development of the guidelines plays into some perceived practical limitations among members of the media:

J2: I think some of their applications for how the media should circumscribe what it does fell down... I think they lose credibility when they do that kind of thing, and I wish they had consulted with enough people not to do that.

Respondents also debated the merits and applicability of the language of ‘avoid’ and ‘convey’ used by the guidelines. While some found the ‘convey’ aspects to be unrealistic given the barrier of space considerations, others felt that the ‘convey’ recommendations were easier to implement, while recommendations of things to ‘avoid’ tread into overly restrictive territory. Participant J1 shared thoughts on the applicability of the guidelines: “...that has been my

criticism of them from the get go. They are well intentioned but they don't really understand the business so a lot of their advice is not practical."

Sub-theme 2: The value of independence in reporting. Respondents described the inherent characteristics and values of journalists and editors in media culture as a barrier to accepting and using the guidelines. One of these values is the importance of independence in the media. Participants stated that maintaining independence is a primary responsibility for journalists, who are in essence advocating for the rights of all individuals to discuss the issues they feel are important. E1's comment clarifies this value:

E1: Journalists, as you know, jealously guard that right. We're not advocating for anything special, but for the rights of every citizen to be able to talk about things that are of public interest.

It is this responsibility that drives journalists to remain independent in their ability to report on whatever they deem is of public interest. Something that places limitations on this ability, one participant stated, would be poorly received by members of the media:

J2: We're in a very plain-speaking business, that's one of the central tenets of journalism, to speak plainly, and not to use the word suicide when a suicide has occurred is simply the kind of guideline that will be ignored by every newspaper in North America.

Another participant felt that the suicide reporting guidelines' listing of words, phrases and representations of suicide that should be avoided or limited within reporting resembled censorship:

J6: ...it's just a bunch of rules like don't use suicide in the headlines, don't do a bunch of stuff... Which is really just censorship, which I completely disagree with...Newspapers

and the media should feel free to talk about what they want. And that includes everything that is potentially difficult to talk about.”

The value of independence in the culture of the media is also reflected in participant J6’s statement regarding the nature of journalists: “So obviously for journalists, the biggest thing they’re on about is independence in everything they do.” This independent nature was also linked by participants to journalistic tendencies to continually question existing norms and understanding, including knowledge around suicide contagion and suicide reporting. As J8 states: “So even the notion of copycat suicide--it’s something that even within journalism, journalists would be liable to question, is that in fact the case, how do we back that up, how do we know that?” The concept was also linked by J8 to resisting being pushed in any one direction or becoming an advocate for a specific cause:

J8: Journalists, being sort of fiercely individualistic and independent, resist being pushed in any direction on anything... Media tend not to jump on bandwagons. We tend to be the ones who watch and tell... We tend not to, as far as I can tell, become an actor.

These characteristics and tendencies can act as a potential barrier to media buy-in and use of suicide reporting guidelines, as J1 shared: “Journalists don’t take suggestions very well. We tend to be independent thinkers.”

Sub-theme 3: The value of flexibility in guidelines. While independence is a must in reporting, as respondent E1 shares, professional regulations and organizational guidelines exist:

E1: The media is like any other profession, it’s not self-regulated exactly the same way that lawyers or accountants are, but there are press councils.

However, participants hold the value of flexibility in these regulations and standards of practice in high regard. Journalists and editors remain accountable to organizations and to the

public within the bounds of good taste and what is in the public interest. As such, they respond best to parameters that allow them the flexibility of reporting the story as they desire while remaining within these bounds. This idea relates to the importance of independence in how stories are approached and communicated. Respondents shared that hard and fast rules are difficult to implement, as every story exists with different circumstances and a different climate surrounding it. These circumstances play an important role in determining what gets reported and how, as suggested by E1 in the following anecdote:

E1: I'll give you another case in point, when we were dealing with [for example] a third soldier that committed suicide, we talk about it, do we cover this one now? Are we now part of the process? And I don't think we did the story that time, but then another soldier killed himself, a woman this time actually, and I wasn't involved in those particular discussions but it was deemed more important to do, coming at a time when veterans offices are being closed around the country and services for veterans may not be there.

In sum, stories must be approached on a case-by-case basis, an idea that links to Theme 1/sub-theme 1 and the reality of the ad-hoc nature of the media. Guidelines must be flexible enough to allow room for interpretation in responding to different circumstances, as E3 states: "...it's very hard to be black and white in journalism because you never know what kind of situation you're going to face." Several respondents felt that the suicide reporting guidelines do offer this flexibility as they are just that, guidelines, that are not meant to be strictly followed, as participant E2 shares: "They are not an iron rule, they are guidelines." As well, participants viewed guidelines with explanations that allow journalists to implement the concepts according to their own interpretation and using their own language, instead of blindly following

recommendations, positively. For example, regarding the Canadian Mental Health Association guidelines, J8 stated the following:

J8: I guess I found the Responsible Suicide Reporting Guidelines issues by the CMHA out of Toronto, I found them just a little bit more explanatory for people who might be liable to question do I really need to do this, or why do I need to do this.

Regarding the Associated Press' Reporting on Suicide toolkit, respondent E3 shared: "...that's what I like about these guidelines, they offer rules and guidelines and explain why, as opposed to just saying do this, don't do that."

Sub-theme 4: Media culture and guideline tone. In light of the values inherent in media culture, participants explored questions around the tone and expectations inherent in the suicide reporting guidelines. Several participants felt the tone of the suicide reporting guidelines reflected principles and values similar to those embodied by media every day. For example, J1 stated: "I think we both have the same philosophy and the same approach. You know; 'you have to be respectful', 'you have to be cautious' etc." Participant E3 further reflected this sentiment in the following statement: "I think they fit our code of ethics, which also talks about showing sensitivity to people. This gives more specifics on it, and it has the same general tone to it as well."

Alternatively, some participants reported perceiving the tone of the guidelines negatively for a number of reasons. J2 felt the tone of the guidelines, having been written by medical professionals, reflected a set of medical values with a different purpose and different way of understanding than those of the news media: "I think those guidelines are helpful, the guidelines themselves may not be perfect, but I think the guidelines news organizations set up are of a

different purpose than the guidelines set up by the CPA might have.” Respondent J1 offered this thought:

J1: ...the medical people get engrossed in the styles of medical guidelines, I understand why it's done the way it's done... I know that if we sat down journalists and had them work on medical guidelines, I'm sure they [medical people] would have a good laugh...

Participant J8 highlighted a potential contradiction between the degree to which the medical community understands the concepts inherent in suicide contagion theory and the degree to which the media buys into these concepts, suggesting that the guidelines assume prior understanding and buy-in from the media where that particular value may clash with media culture:

J8: I'm not sure if the medical profession would see that there would be value [in consulting the media], because it seems to me that the people who believe that the guidelines are helpful might not necessarily benefit from understanding that people in journalism question things... And so the people who are developing such guidelines have already accepted the notion of copycat suicide...

Several additional respondents echoed J8's opinion by sharing that, indeed, there is a lack of culture within the media around mental health and suicide reporting. As J4 noted: “We have codes of conduct and things like that for how we're supposed to conduct ourselves, but in terms of the reporting guidelines for suicide, I've never been given any sort of mandate or instruction.”

Respondent J6 similarly echoed this idea:

J6: I know the editors at [news organization] are pretty good about handling it, if you had questions they'd be pretty good resource, but there's nothing set up or defined to talk about it... there are written guidelines, but you know, they're more like suggestions as

opposed to rules. I think we may have had to read them when we first started, but I don't really remember, it wasn't driven home.

Several participants also shared that the guidelines' tone implied that limiting the dialogue around suicide is preferable, as evidenced by the following statements. From respondent J7: "I would suggest that they would prefer that we just don't cover suicide at all. Like they've made guidelines, but if they had their way we wouldn't write about it all." Respondent J5 similarly shared:

J5: I'm sure they were well meant, but I find them condescending, but worse than that I think they are counterproductive, and I think they've been proven so. The whole tone of them to me, and the way I received them, is that if you sweep it under the rug, that's the best approach.

Limiting dialogue relates to the restrictions members of the media fight against in their drive for independence, as well as the value of flexibility as respondents with this view felt the guidelines suggested blanket rules against reporting suicide. Respondent J6 also felt that the guidelines' tone of limiting dialogue altogether appears to inflate the risk of contagion and may unnecessarily turn the media off of reporting suicide at all: "...if you were to read that, you would be, like, "well why the hell would I report on suicide anyway if this how bad things are going to be?"'" The question of the tone of the guidelines also appears in J3's statement suggesting that the tone does not reflect the language of journalists, which reflects the fast-paced reality of the environment:

J3: You would really have to have somebody competent explain to hard-nosed journalists that we know you guys deal with a lot of crap, but the fact is, we really feel strongly that you need to change your approach to covering suicide so that fewer people will kill

themselves. And it's got to be as blunt as that. We like bluntness. We like to report in a blunt way and we respond to bluntness... You can put it in a peer reviewed academic journal what amounts to the fact that we have concluded therefore whereas.... they write totally different than journalists.

Theme 2: Media Learning

This theme delves into the factors that influence journalists' and editors' learning, and explores how the suicide reporting guidelines responded to these learning needs. Respondents explained that their professional influences, including editors, peers and respected organizations play a major role in the ways they approach stories, in dictating the professional culture and in defining the professional values that shape the learning of members of the media. Respondents touched on how they learned of the guidelines, and explored how they would prefer to hear about them in light of professional influences. Participants also outlined how learning typically progresses in a media environment, and whether or not the communication of the suicide reporting guidelines fulfilled these learning needs.

Sub-theme 1: Professional influences. Participants frequently referred to the degree of value and respect held for others working in the profession. These influences included editors, peers and professional organizations and bodies that play a role in validating the place of stories, shaping reporting, dictating newsroom culture and creating value around particular topics or processes. Respondents repeatedly mentioned the role of editors in determining how to frame a story and how editors require journalists to justify the stories they choose in terms of public interest. Respondent J3 shows how editors ensure a sensitive story is justified and fits within an organization's ethics and standards of practice: "...the editor would probably ask the questions like "who are we identifying here" and "why is suicide relevant." These participants seem to

suggest that, with a sensitive story such as suicide, more attention may be paid by editors to ensure it does not offend the organization's standards of quality for reporting. The editor also serves to cultivate and promote the culture of each individual newsroom. Participants shared that there are a diversity of newsroom cultures that may be different depending on the values of the senior editors, and that this might influence how stories are approached. As J6 stated: "I think some of them and some regions are more enlightened and progressive than others, and also sometimes it just comes down to the editor you're working with, your bosses, if they're more enlightened or not..." J7 furthered this concept by adding:

J7: Every newsroom has its own culture, so some news organizations might have a different approach to how they deal with victims of violence, some might be more aggressive in trying to find them, some might respect privacy more.

These comments indicate that editors have a role to play in influencing the culture and values of a newsroom and, as a result, the behaviour of journalists who must work within this culture. In this vein, J6 highlighted the importance of targeting those who control culture if change is to be effected: "...if you're going to effect change in that newsroom, you're going to have to talk to people in that newsroom because they're the ones who run their own newsroom." Respondent J8 concurred with this idea by sharing the influence of editors on journalists' behaviour: "... it would make a difference hearing it from your editor. From your peers, it's just another consideration. It may or may not be influential..."

While J8's comment suggests that peer attitudes are less influential than those of editors, several participants shared the importance of peer opinion and peer support in reporting and in sharing knowledge. Colleagues may support one another through consultations on what should be reported and how, and can help each other become aware of new resources or ways of

conducting business. Peers can offer a mutually understood perspective that makes for practical advice when faced with difficult stories. In reflecting upon the concept of peers as a resource, respondent J7 stated the following in relation to an experience reporting a youth's suicide death:

J7: I think had I had my druthers, I probably would have been able to reach people I trust and get their advice on it, what should I do, what shouldn't I do....

In addition, participants shared that peers are also an important source for new information and learning. Not only do peers publish stories and content that may be of value to other journalists, but the stamp of peer approval is influential in increasing the value of particular topics, resources and reporting styles. In discussing the Associated Press' suicide reporting guidelines, participant E3, an editor, suggested that seeing editors' names credited with the development of the guidelines increased acceptance of these guidelines:

E3: I'd looked at a few and it was a group set up including newspaper editors, it's a US survey but it included editors from the Associated Press, from their managing editor, and it included suicide prevention groups as well, so it was those two groups coming together and coming up with this. So in terms of all of this, I thought they were better guidelines just because they're more practical and they included newspaper editors as well.

Similarly, interviews frequently referred to the influence of professional organizations and bodies in sharing credible information and creating value around particular topics. For example, participants E3 and J8 referred to the role that institutions such as the Poynter Institution, the Canadian Journalism Foundation, the Neiman Foundation and various journalism schools such as Ryerson University and Carleton University can play in sharing information with journalists because of their respected status throughout the profession. As J8 states: "these organizations that have taken on somewhat of an educational role in fostering the dialogue

among journalists and helping them to see the perspectives they need to see in their daily reporting.” Such organizations are respected as they understand the perspectives of working members of the media, and their employees are often members of the media themselves.

Furthermore, these organizations play a role in creating value around particular topics.

Respondent J8 mentioned the Governor General’s office and their award body the Michener Awards, as well as the National Newspaper Awards, in motivating journalists to adopt values:

J8: Those organizations are better placed to take an active role in furthering the public health guidelines, and to motivate journalists and editors in a way... In terms of motivating that kind of reporting, recognizing that it has a benefit in some way, I think that a better way to do that, a better way to foster the discussion is through organizations like that.

Respected organizations and award bodies serve to recognize reporting that reflects particular values, and may increase journalists’ and editors’ perception that these approaches are useful or meaningful. This concept is also reflected in respondent J7’s thoughts about the Canadian Press (CP) Style Guide:

J7: CP puts out the CP Style Guide, which is the guide for reporting that is given to every journalism student... so if this is a book that journalism students are given or a journalist in the newsroom is dealing with suicide and wants to know how to be responsible, the Guide right now is no help. CP Style is what most news organizations use, like what words are uppercase and what words are lowercase, everyone uses CP. Yeah, it would be useful...

According to participants, professional bodies are well placed to position mental health and suicide reporting in a new light, and to spark a relevant and respected dialogue that considers

the realities and values of members of the media. In addition to professional bodies, participants shared that seeing peer and organizational voices reflected in guidelines is useful in increasing acceptance and use of guidelines. Respondent E2 shared the following example of internally drafted standards of reporting: “The Standards of Practice was clearly drafted with the guidelines, and because it’s our iteration in our Standards of Practice guidebook, there was wide acceptance among our journalists, no one really tested it.” Interviews revealed that many participants did not feel that the voice of any professional influences were heard in the suicide reporting guidelines, which may have affected media reception of them, as participant J5 shares:

J5: I would be very surprised if any journalist was involved in developing them.... Not all of the guidelines, some of them make sense, but the overall tone of them is patronizing and I would bet that no journalist was involved in the development of them.

Sub-theme 2: Media learning processes. In addition to the support and influence of professional contemporaries, respondents explored the conditions under which learning happens in the media and reflected on the place of the suicide reporting guidelines within these learning processes. Respondents shared that while the learning experience can often begin in journalism school, few things at school were prescriptive, such as dictating how suicide should be reported. Indeed, suicide reporting was rarely even discussed at school, as participant J6 shares:

J6: “We didn’t get into it at all. I wrote about it and it led to some discussion at school. So I know with journalism school like Ryerson, they wouldn’t tell you that this is the rule and you should follow it, you just have a discussion about it, which we did, so it wasn’t like it was coming from there.”

Rather, the culture of journalism school promotes critical reflection, questioning and discussion. Participants stated that the bulk of learning in the media happens in the newsroom as

journalists start reporting and develop a base of experiential knowledge to combine with the influences of professional contemporaries:

J6: So much of the newsroom on any subject, you just kind of learn on the job and you learn from the people around you, the reporters and your bosses.

Experiential knowledge also helps to develop the understanding and sensitivity necessary to approach a suicide story appropriately. Rather than using particular guidelines to write sensitive stories, participants reported that many of the stories they were able to treat respectfully emerged from personal experience reporting difficult subjects. In discussing how sensitivity matures in the media, participant *J7* felt that experience reporting suicide helped in shaping future reporting:

J7: I think it is one of those things that if you've covered it and have been impacted by it, then you are more sensitive to it. If you cover something like this, it's similar to developing the specific knowledge about any sort of topic, this one obviously a little more sensitive than some, you do want to try to pass it on.

This participant also shared that since they have the experience, they may be more likely to be tasked with such a story to increase the sensitivity of the story:

J7: Because I've written the [youth suicide] story, if I ever had to write another one, and frankly I hope I don't have to, although I am more sensitive to it so maybe my editors would ask me to write it because they know they're going to get someone that's going to be sensitive.

Respondent *J8* similarly stated that often suicide stories are given to senior editors or reporters who can treat stories sensitively given their experience:

J8: ...the people reporting on military suicide right now are some of the senior people in our organization, in our Parliamentary Bureau or people covering national defense, someone who's been to Afghanistan. So perhaps there is an assumption that they will treat it sensitively...

Sub-theme 3: Communication of the suicide reporting guidelines. When asked in interviews about how they came to learn about the suicide reporting guidelines, participants shared that their learning came from information provided by senior professionals, from their peers, and from their own research, as respondent E3 describes:

E3: It probably came up around a year and a half ago, and some of our editors had thought about this before, and it was one of our editors who drew my attention to suicide.org and I'd also been talking to Andre Picard about the CPA guidelines as well.

Furthermore, few participants cited that they learned of the suicide reporting guidelines from a particular health body. Respondents J2 and J7 stated they received a brochure with information about contagion and the guidelines, while participant J1 shared this experience:

J1: I was familiar with the concept beforehand again because I write a lot about this topic so I've read up on it. So I don't know that I got it specifically from the CPA...

This echoes the primary learning channels described by respondents throughout the interviews: editors, peers and personal experience. In line with the value of the expertise of professional influences in Theme 2/Sub-theme 1, J6, felt that recommendations for reporting suicide might be more compelling if they were to come from individuals with experience reporting: "So that'll be a lot more effective, I think, instead of doctors or psychiatrists, the people who've never worked in a newsroom or written an article telling people what to do."

Participants also explored additional means by which communication of the guidelines and their concepts might be effective, including filtering through peers designated to health reporting who could relay information back, providing face to face presentations at news stations, providing training for editors, sending email blasts when a suicide occurs, and the extending of expertise consultations by health organizations in the event of a suicide. While training was addressed as a potential means to learning about the suicide reporting guidelines, several participants felt that this would be an ineffective use of resources, as suicide overall is a small percentage of what gets addressed in a newsroom in a day. Participant J3 also shared a belief in the importance of integrating media learning and communication needs for behaviour change:

J3: But in the end, if that [contagion] is what has motivated the CPA to actually bother coming up with that line, then they need to really communicate that message bluntly to journalists... It has to be more than an academic pursuit.

As this participant suggests, journalists are not doctors or researchers and must be engaged in communication in ways beyond academia. Participants felt that this type of information and call to practice change cannot be imposed by external organizations, as participant J6 believed: “Yeah I mean it seems like they wrote that and they just expected people to follow the rules, it doesn’t make any sense. You don’t go into another industry and tell them what to do.”

It is also important to note that three of eleven participants had not heard of the guidelines before the interview for this study. One participant shared the thought that this is a failure on the part of health professionals to adequately communicate the guidelines to members of the media:

J3: To be honest, I think the first time I'd heard of them was when you asked me to do this interview... If you've talked to a number of people in the news business and they don't have a clear understanding of what the guidelines are and those guidelines are five years old, then you have to have part of your thesis look at journalistic ignorance and why is there ignorance around these guidelines... If you're talking to a number of senior journalists and they're going "what the frig is this?" then there is a problem.

Theme 3: Decision-Making in Reporting Suicide

The subject of decision-making in journalism, particularly as it relates to reporting suicide, was a prominent theme in interviews. This theme accounts for the factors that influence the decision-making process in suicide reporting, including public interest and internal checks and balances, the journalistic and personal ethics that come into play, and how the guidelines support, hinder, or are redundant in light of existing elements in the decision-making process.

Sub-theme 1: Public interest. In making the decision to report or abstain from reporting a suicide, public interest remains front of mind:

J4: ...it's always what's in the public interest. First of all, why are we reporting on this... I think the basic question is, for any journalist really, but I know certainly for me when it does come up, I try to frame it around the idea of 'is it in the public interest to report this?'"

This includes considering when a suicide is in the public interest and examining what factors ground this public interest, such as the death of a public figure, a suicide related to a current issue, such as bullying, social media or the military, or for conversations around mental health more generally. Elements of suicide are often newsworthy, as E2 shared: "Suicide is a very tragic and very private thing, but sometimes there are aspects of it that are newsworthy."

However, there is greater consideration for the public interest of the story, and suicide is a case that gets treated accordingly, as respondent J3 stated: "...a sensitive story like a suicide, there would probably be a lot more attention paid by at least one editor..." Furthermore, participants stated that there is increasing consensus within the media that reporting suicide is in the public interest and that, in journalism, public interest tends to trump every other consideration. As participant J5 stated:

J5: ...then again, what's more important? Massive community awareness that could prevent many suicides, or the censoring of those pieces of information? I think the good outweighs the potential harm in that instance... What's really another fundamental aspect here is what's in the public interest. That's a huge consideration. If something is really in the public interest to know, that tends to trump everything. You can make modifications to what you do, perhaps you don't name people, you leave out a bit of information that may hurt them and may not be pertinent to the actual story, but I would say that awareness about suicide, particular in children and young people, is hugely in the public interest.

Sub-theme 2: Internal checks and balances. In sharing how they go about reporting a suicide, respondents mentioned that there is a lack of understanding of the comprehensive checks and balances that exist within a newsroom and within the media profession more broadly. Interviews showed that editors and professional associations keep reporting in line by ensuring stories are justified as being in the public interest, as participant E1 shares:

*E1: We have our own processes. If someone believes we've gone too far they go to the ombudsman. Most of the big newspapers, the *Star*, the *Globe*, they belong to the Ontario Press Council, it's a voluntary thing, but those decisions to report it, a newspaper that has*

voluntarily joined the Press Council is obliged to report the findings of the complaint, whether for or against them, and as far as self-regulation goes, they're pretty good.

Participants also noted that in the event that insensitive stories that do not respect professional guidelines or ethics get through to publication, the consequences can be grave.

Respondent J3 mentioned that irresponsible reporting can also affect career mobility:

J3: ...for people who have perhaps gratuitously reported on a suicide that somehow fell through the cracks, the checks and balances that I described, the boom comes down pretty hard on them...Usually someone will rip their heads off. Or write a formal written reprimand that will go on your file, which actually is like a black mark on your performance, and if you get a few black marks on your performance it can determine whether or not you can find employment over time.

In decision-making about suicide reporting, participants shared that there is a particular process a story goes through before it gets published, including justifying reporting to editors, discussions among reporters, and revisions and reiterations before it gets to a paper, as E1 related:

E1: It's three-pronged. We talk about the story in advance before we actually decide to do it or assign someone to it. Then once the decision has been made that we need to do the story...then we assign it, not to a junior person but someone who can deal with it sensitively and who has experience in life as well as a journalist. And then third it goes through the normal vetting process, and if it were particularly sensitive, we'd call it 'red flag' and [the ombudsman] would look at it to decide have we hit the right note here, are we balancing competing interests in these kinds of stories.

Suicide was also deemed a special case that warranted additional attention and sensitivity before publication. Participants also felt that there is a lack of public understanding around this process and that more awareness might help the public and health organizations better understand the motivation and rationale behind media decision-making:

J5: So there's a lot of checks and balances that go on inside newsrooms that these particular guidelines completely ignore. We don't just go out there and write willy-nilly about anything and everything. It's kind of an external perception that people have but it couldn't be further from the truth."

Sub-theme 3: Ethics in journalism. Interviews touched on the ethics, both stemming from the organization and from personal ethics, that editors and reporters employ when approaching stories. Participants shared that the media does sensitive stories as part of their daily routine, and knowing how to approach them responsibly, within the bounds of public interest and organizational checks and balances, is not a foreign concept. In regards to suicide reporting, participant J5 shared the following:

J5: ...it's a very a sensitive subject, but we're not aliens to sensitive subjects. We write about them all the time. The bus-train crash was not suicide, but a hugely difficult story to write, dealing with the families and what have you. Again you employ your own ethical and journalistic guidelines, and your own personal ethics kick in as well. It's something we do a lot of.

Participant E1 expanded: "...the public interest is weighed against the invasion of privacy and the potential for people to use this as experience to take their own lives." These ethics also include an understanding and respect for approaching families, and considering the impact of reporting on ordinary people and public figures. Participant J5 provided the following example:

J5: ...obviously in ethics of any story you are weighing the value of a story against the harm you might do. If a politician has been dipping their hands in the public till, the fact that you might hurt the politician in reporting that is way down the list, it's almost irrelevant. But if you have ordinary people who aren't used to dealing with news media and they don't perhaps understand the ramifications of talking to news media, you have to minimize any harm that might come to them by what you write and what you publish

Participant *J7* shared a personal philosophy towards ethical reporting as: "balanced, fair, responsible." In light of these existing ethics, participants explored the utility of the suicide reporting guidelines. Some respondents, such as *E3*, found them to be in line with existing organizational guidelines: "I think they fit our code of ethics, which also talks about showing sensitivity to people. This gives more specifics on it, and it has the same general tone to it as well." While others, such as *J5*, found them ignorant of the ethical standards journalists already operate under: "...they ignore the ethical guidelines that we journalists in mainstream media work under every day. And they are fairly strict guidelines and among them is the credo of 'you don't hurt people.' You avoid hurting people wherever possible."

Sub-theme 4: The role of the guidelines in supporting decision-making. Given the factors involved in decision-making, particularly as it relates to a sensitive and ethically-charged topic such as suicide, participants explored how the guidelines support or do not support editors and journalists in their approach to stories. Several participants, such as *J2*, found that the guidelines act as a set of restrictions on the already numerous decisions and considerations journalists are required to analyze with each story: "In a newspaper people are making decisions on deadline and there's a thousand decisions to make and banning words in newspapers, that always turns people the wrong way." Others found that the guidelines are useful in that they

serve as an education piece that provides more information about the context of suicide and suicide contagion. This, as participant E1 shares, is crucial, as the more information journalists have, the better they are able to capture stories properly for the public:

E1: ...we're journalists, so the more information available to us in writing our stories, the more informed our choices will be about the stories that we cover... Any information is helpful. More information is always best. We suffer if we do not have enough information.

In addition, while respondents may not have felt the guidelines were fully applicable to their reporting or to their organization, some believed they could add to the discussion when journalists are making decisions without compromising independence or flexibility in telling the story:

J4: I think it would add to the discussion because I feel that any sort of codes or guidelines, things like that that we have, perhaps don't talk enough specifically about this particular issue. I think it could potentially be a help... I think that with a topic like that, it's a sensitive one and there's never going to be a 100% consensus, and I think having that discussion is really important.

Though as participant J1 states, this is where their utility ends: "I think they take part of the discussion but that's about it."

Theme 4: Changes in Social Landscape

This theme relates to journalists' and editors' perceptions of the past and current social and professional landscape surrounding mental health and suicide and how the suicide reporting guidelines align with the evolution of this landscape. Participants identified three areas of

change; a shift in the framing of suicide in the media, a revisiting of traditional rules and research around suicide contagion and the media, and a reduction in media control of social dialogue.

Sub-theme 1: Shift in framing suicide. From interviews, it was apparent that the suicide reporting is improving in terms of becoming more sensitive and less stigmatizing, as suggested by E3's statement: "I think that since I've started the media is much more sensitive about suicide and mental illness in general. I think there's been quite a big change." The media is reporting more around suicide as a topic, and rather than framing it as something criminal or shameful, reporting often now links suicide to public health concerns or wider societal issues, as J4 shared:

J4: I feel as though any time it's being reported, I try to be very careful about the facts and not to lead a reader down a certain direction, like this may have led to a person's suicide, because we just don't know those complex issues, so really just trying to be very factual. Making sure that if you're reporting on it, there's a reason behind, it's not just for a headline, and if there's a wider issue to be discussed, try to get at it in an intelligent way.

Reporting is also emerging as a vehicle to offering hope to those who may be struggling, as evidenced by participant J6's statement:

J6: ...if you know what you're doing, and you're sensitive in this sort of area, you can actually help people with your reporting. If you don't sensationalize it, but you also don't shy away from it.

Two respondents, E1 and J7, also shared that the focus needs to be about honouring a life lost. Participant J7 provided this opinion:

J7: "But I also come at it from a different angle, and that's the notion of honouring a person's life. I would argue the same thing about [youth] and every other child, young

person or adult who has died by suicide, their lives have been snuffed out and I think that in some respects you risk not honouring them if you completely ignore the story because it's a suicide and we're not supposed to touch those."

Participants offered a variety of ideas about the source or catalyst for this evolution. Several noted that the increased level of awareness and interest in mental health topics more broadly has fuelled a change in reporting. Others reported the view that the change may be related to a corresponding response from the media to provide this information. Some believed that there is an increased consensus within the news profession that hiding suicide actually does more harm than good, and that public awareness about suicide may trump harm to the few who may be susceptible to the effects of contagion. Furthermore, participants suggested that social media may be a factor in the increased openness of society. Several participants expressed their belief that the guidelines are, and have the potential to contribute to, shaping suicide reporting and social dialogue more broadly, as participant J2 found:

J2: I think some of their guidelines make immense amounts of sense. The idea that suicide is never inexplicable, you know, that you don't want to suggest that suicide is inexplicable, because it is almost always related to mental illness. And, you know, I hate that verb when people say that someone has 'successfully' committed suicide, I think they are very good at getting rid of that kind of language.

Conversely, others such as respondent J6 felt that the guidelines are actually detrimental:

J6: I think it's just for the longest time there's been the same message that's in the CPA guidelines given to journalists that they actually cause harm...So, yeah I don't think it had any effect. If anything it's detrimental. It just reinforces these old rules, they're citing old research, they didn't do any new research.

In either case, respondent J8 noted that while there is a push to create more space for suicide dialogue, there has yet to be a corresponding push for the media to analyze how it approaches mental health and suicide: "...by and large I wouldn't say it's occupied a place in the discussion, which it probably deserves, a place in the public discussion, which it probably deserves." Several participants echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the suicide reporting is essentially uncharted territory in reporting, and that the guidelines could be a valuable resource in providing a roadmap for the lack of experience in suicide reporting. Respondent J7 stated the following:

J7: I mean yeah, if we accept that this is an area of reporting that has not been done traditionally, then it is helpful to have some idea of how to do it. And how to do it respectfully and how to do it well. So yeah, I think that the guidelines are totally helpful, that's probably why I shared them initially.

While participant J4 expressed this opinion:

J4: I think it could potentially do a service for people who really just need a fast understanding of the issues involved. I think that anything like that would almost be a relief. You want to be careful, you want to be sensitive, but if you don't know how and you're on a deadline, the guidelines can maybe play that role in a really nice way.

Sub-theme 2: Revisiting traditional rules around suicide reporting. Almost all participants shared that when they started out in the field, suicide was almost never reported due to the belief that writing about suicide would cause more suicide. Respondents also revealed that they were not often provided with adequate information about suicide contagion in order to develop their own comprehension of the topic, and that a rationale for restricted reporting was not clearly articulated. Participant J8 shared the following example:

J8: I knew that the paper's then policy was not to report on suicides, we just didn't report them, which was the blanket policy, I never quite understood why. I assumed at the time it had more to do with the stigma around suicide... That was my impression anyway, whether that was the case or whether that was the reason for the ban on reporting suicides I don't think I ever knew, I don't think anyone ever explicitly told me....

As respondent J8's statement suggests, one of the reasons for not reporting suicide was due to the shame associated with suicide and the impetus to respect families' dignity by avoiding discussing suicide. However, as mental health awareness increases and suicide claims a greater level of support in social dialogue, the concept of respecting families by limiting reporting is also shifting, as evidenced by participant J1's statement:

J1: I think that the parents of the girl in Ottawa, the daughter of an Ottawa Senators player, she took her life and those parents were very outspoken. It wasn't a question don't report about it, they wanted us to report about it. And you see that more and more, parents reaching out to the media as opposed to pushing them away...

Where once it may have been shameful, speaking to the media and sharing their story may now be therapeutic or healing for families, as participant J3 shared: "Like with the Rethaeh Parsons story, her parents got involved with the media because, and I think this happens a lot, it was part of their coping mechanism..." Respondent J5 found after writing a story about a young man who died by suicide that the family actually found a sense of comfort in sharing their story:

J5: I think the article was ultimately a great comfort for them because it included all that information and that help stuff. They knew too that the Richardsons had found inspiration from their story. It made a really horrible, horrible situation slightly more tolerable.

This same participant also found that the aftermath of the story revealed that many families have regretted covering up suicides:

J5: I got letters, literally from all over the country, from families whose children had committed suicide and I remember two or three of them said they always regretted keeping it quiet and not talking about it.

These traditional norms limiting the dialogue around suicide were also reflected in the language of police, politicians and society at large. For example, respondents revealed that police use the term ‘unlawful suicide’ when sharing information with reporters, and obituaries read ‘died suddenly.’ However, while support for mental health dialogue is increasing, many participants felt that the guidelines are simply reviving old arguments for limiting dialogue that may actually contribute to stigma. Participant J1 shared the following opinion:

J1: My bottom line is, I think we should treat suicide like everything else, that’s the ultimate goal in this. I think that by having special rules, having special guidelines it just creates more stigma rather than take it away... Let’s cover suicide exactly the same way we would cover murder. Some of it’s newsworthy some of it isn’t. Sometimes we do big take outs, sometimes we do a brief, sometimes we do nothing. Use the exact same standards it doesn’t have to be different and we don’t have to make this big deal about it because it involves mental health. I think that is really outdated thinking.

Sub-theme 3: Reduction in media control of dialogue. Participants shared that as society becomes more open and players such as social media gain traction, the media has less control over social dialogue than it once had. This reduced level of control over dialogue makes suicide reporting guidelines often difficult to implement and maintain over time. First and foremost, respondents stated that the dialogue around suicide and mental health often plays out

over social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs. Respondent J7 offered this example:

J7: [Youth] died on a Friday, the [father] sent out a very short statement on Saturday saying '[father of youth suicide victim]'s son has died suddenly,' and I'm sure that people were sort of like huh...a 15 year old doesn't just die suddenly, and when I got into my office my boss just asked me to have a quick peek, as soon as I went on Facebook and saw the RIP page, it didn't take me long to connect the dots, that this was a child who had died by suicide and who had also clearly been the victim of bullying, and when I found the page, it was all confirmed.

Participants pointed to research that suggests that young people are more susceptible to suicide contagion, and participants noted that this population may not be receiving their information through mainstream channels, calling into question the relevancy of guidelines in a digital, social media-driven age:

J2: The problem now is that they are somewhat anachronistic, in that with the web, young people, the people who are particularly sensitive to the contagion effect, don't turn to newspapers for their coverage or news in any event, and there are communities of all kinds on the web that don't follow these rules in any way, shape or form.

If this information is out there, being circulated and read regardless of the mainstream media's involvement, is mainstream media still responsible for filtering its reporting?

Respondent J1 shared this opinion:

J1: What's the point of us pretending that we're not going to write about this because it causes contagion and meanwhile kids are posting their stories on Facebook, 'so and so

jumped out of the window at my university' etc. Does that cause contagion? I don't know but how do you control that?

Participants noted the limitations of the guidelines in light of the viral nature of modern news. With instant communications and social media, it can be difficult to control or manage the language being used or how repetitive or excessive coverage is. Participant J7 provided the following example:

J7: Yes I would agree to the idea that suicide is unexplainable, [I would agree to the pieces about] repetitive or excessive coverage, I mean this is one thing that's always stuck with me about the [youth suicide] coverage. One thing that I would have never appreciated the day that I was writing that story, is that it was going to get picked up by CNN, Huffington Post, and that that story was going everywhere. And I think that that's something that, looking back, I don't know if I would say that that's regret, but I didn't realize that, and therefore the family didn't realize that.... The repetitive and excessive coverage, it did sort of go everywhere.

Similarly, respondents expressed difficulty implementing guideline items such as refraining from discussing the method or romanticizing the story when parents, family members and friends become involved in the story. However, as Theme 4/Sub-Theme 2 suggests, it can be respectful to families to report suicide. Participant E3 shared the following example:

E3: And certainly on the Rehtaeh Parson death, we didn't write at first at all about what happened and how she died, by sort of following these rules about avoiding that, but then what happened was that her father started to talk about it, then it becomes very difficult as journalists not to include that in the story. So it did eventually start to come into the stories and I'm not sure you can stop that.

Participant J3 communicated a similar view in dealing with family members getting involved in the dialogue:

J3: What do you do as a journalist with that? Do you go to them and say ‘look, a lot of Canadian psychiatrists have told us that if we actually try to cover this story in an in-depth way, more young people are going to have suicidal thoughts so, I’m sorry, we’re not going to cover you.’ What do we do in that situation?

If this information is out there, like with social media, respondents questioned whether the media can then report it, or if it should avoid discussing it. Participant J3 further related this issue back to the practical realities of the media:

J3: If all news organizations were to say, ‘you know what, we know that Rehtaeh’s parents are motivated by what’s good in the face of tragedy, but we should all just not report them anyway because even though what they think they’re doing is good they are actually going to create some harm.’ Problem is, media organizations are very competitive, and even if one or two thought they would, there would no doubt be another organizations that would and they would lose a competitive advantage and so they all report it.

With additional players, managing reporting to reflect the principles of the guidelines is difficult.

Theme 5: Media Responsibility

Participants provided perspectives around the media’s responsibility to the public in raising awareness and reporting suicide, and also whether existing research linking reporting and suicide is sufficient enough to determine whether the media plays a significant role in suicide contagion overall. Interviews revealed that participants were unclear about the link between

particular guideline items and their reported effects, and suggested that participants did not have enough information to know whether the guidelines are effective in reducing contagion.

Sub-theme 1: Role of the media in society. Participants explored their views on the role of the media in society, with particular reference to the media's role in raising awareness about mental illness and reducing suicide rates. Respondent E3 placed the media at the forefront of change, highlighting and debating emerging topics as they enter social discourse:

E3: ...journalists tend to be a little on the front edge of change of society, so journalists have always been leading the edge on gay rights issues, on mental illness, on poverty and a lot of things, because it's kind of the nature of the work. I think that's part of our job too, to enlighten society.

In this sense, the role of the media is to educate the public and validate topics that are being discussed in informal fora, as the statement by E1 suggests: "...mass media gives much more clout and much more impact..." Respondent J6 felt similarly about mainstream media's role in amplifying social media: "You can talk about whatever you want, and people do now with Twitter and Facebook and people making their own websites, but the media still acts as an amplifier." However, other participants expressed concern over the ability of the media to act out this role in light of what the suicide reporting guidelines are asking of reporters. Participant J3 felt that the media cannot raise awareness of mental health and suicide if there are restrictions placed on reporting suicide; a tragic, yet very real outcome of untreated mental illness:

J3: I'm pretty sure the CPA and most Canadian psychiatrists believe the media has a responsibility to de-stigmatize mental illness. And you can't have it both ways. You can't tell the media 'we don't want you really reporting suicides as often as they happen, but on the other hand we want you to report and do as much coverage as you can on mental

illness so that people will stop treating people with a mental illness with the stigma they do' when the reality is, there are a number of mental illnesses in which suicidal thoughts, suicidal actions, suicidal behaviours, if not outright successful suicide occurs. So I think Canadian psychiatrists and their associations really need to have a fulsome discussion about what they think is the media's role in the whole issue of mental health.

One participant, J1, also felt that the role of media is not to educate, but to act as an organization that is in the business of reporting. In this vein, media responsibility to follow guidelines and/or reduce contagion is negligible: "You know I often have this discussion that we are in the business of information we are not in the business of education and people mistake those things often."

Sub-theme 2: Validity of the research propounding the media's role in reducing contagion. While there was consensus among participants that the phenomenon of suicide contagion is true, questions around the validity of the research evidence propounding the link between suicide reporting and contagion was a prominent theme in interviews, particularly relating to the degree of influence the media holds. Participant J6 shared his views on the research cited in the suicide reporting guidelines:

J6: I think for a long time journalists just followed, or were under the impression that if you wrote about suicide you would cause harm. And so no one really questioned it, really questioned the research or anything, and so that's all I really did in my article, turns out it's a bunch of shitty research that's 30 years old, that doesn't really prove anything... these studies they keep pointing to are, again, I know I keep reiterating that they're like 30 years old, and they're correlational studies, it's not causation.

Other participants expressed not knowing enough, or not being given enough information about suicide contagion to understand the claims the research makes. While others did have a more comprehensive understanding, there was mixed buy-in around particular elements of contagion. For example, respondents felt that contagion as it relates to the suicide of family members or close friends was logical, as participant J6 shares:

J6: It seems like from what I've read, it just seems to me it's how close you are to the person, like if it's your brother or sister or father or son, then you're more likely to commit suicide, I believe in that. It seems like, especially among young people, the research says they are more impressionable, like if your friend in high school dies.

The copycat phenomenon as it relates to method and location was also perceived to have logical grounding:

J5: If you look at ethically, again it's about weight. Ok you can accept perhaps that somebody might copy a method of suicide. I actually don't buy the fact that people get the idea of committing suicide by reading about it or hearing about it.

Conversely, respondents questioned the degree of contagion influence the media holds.

Participants cited a lack of clarity around substantiated proof that a link exists:

J3: I almost intuitively think there has to be some connection, but to me it's a question of degree. How do you quantify that this young person, that this old person, how many of them committed suicide because they heard, watched or read a media report about suicide. How do you ever quantify that? To me, unless the suicide note says, 'I saw a story about suicide on CBC Television and so tonight I decided to kill myself,' I don't know how you can actually quantify what the effect is.

One respondent shared the thought that given the complex nature of suicide and mental health, a causal link between reporting and suicide is too simplistic:

J6: I just don't think you can blame it on any one thing... Especially blaming it on the media, it's even more simplified. Mental health issues have got to be some of the most complex areas around now, and we don't understand the brain... I don't know. Common sense just tells me it isn't any one given thing.

Furthermore, journalists shared that there is an increasing push to revisit the interpretation of the current research. Respondent J6 expands on his opinions about contagion research in sharing the case of how higher numbers of mental health-related emergency room visits in youth after a high-profile suicide may be interpreted as the media contributing to contagion, it may also be interpreted as youth recognizing there may be a problem and reaching out: "I feel like that evidence ten years ago would have been like the media causing the spike in suicide rates, whereas now it's more like these people are suffering anyway and now they're calling out for help..." Participant J5 shared learning from an article written on waitlists in mental health units:

J5: I wrote a story that was in the [paper] about three months ago about how there were massive waiting lists at [hospital] for people looking to get help for their kids. And part of that they accepted was heightened awareness, and the fact that I'm sure a lot of people who go seek help for their kids don't need to and they're just panicking, but I mean, so what...but if you get one in there for every 10 who don't need to be it's not a bad ratio. We're a bit... in this country a little bit backward on the suicide prevention.

In some cases, lack of clarity around the research findings shaped respondents' perception of the ability of guidelines to influence contagion at all. Respondent J1 offered this thought:

J1: So what my reading of it is that what's contagious is more the location rather than media coverage that doesn't necessarily lead to more suicides but leads people to copy methods...

While there was recognition of the knowledge and expertise of the health field from several participants, many could not express clear buy-in to the concepts promoted in the suicide contagion guidelines, and several participants, such as E1, stated they were unsure whether the use of the guidelines actually influenced contagion at all: "I honestly don't know. I'd like to say yes, but I'm not sure I can back that up with any quantifiable evidence." Participant J1 believed similarly, and expanded this thought to suggest that guidelines may not be influential to media practices overall:

J1: No, I don't think, no not particularly. As I said, at the end of the day I'm not sold that the concept is correct in the first place so I'm not sure that guidelines will change them [suicide contagion]. And I don't think guidelines like this will have a lot of impact on the media, to be honest.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the influence of communication strategies upon the attitudes and opinions of media professionals towards suicide reporting guidelines. In order to understand these influences, the following research questions were posed:

Q.1. How do media professionals in English-speaking news organizations in Canada perceive the suicide reporting guidelines?

Q.2. How do media professionals describe their engagement in communication regarding the guidelines?

Q.3. Does engagement in communication affect media professionals' perceptions of the guidelines?

In light of the interview findings, this chapter aims to answer these research questions and to understand their implications through the lens of the excellence theory framework and the two-way symmetrical communication model.

RQ.1. How do media professionals in English-speaking news organizations in Canada perceive the suicide reporting guidelines?

The first research question aimed to understand how members of the media perceive the suicide reporting guidelines given their experience as reporters and editors, and with reporting suicide more specifically.

Duty to report. Christians (2011) argues that journalism is inherently embedded within a social context. The media serves the public by ensuring the flow of objective information and independent opinions so that the public may develop a comprehensive understanding of the world and make informed decisions about the issues that affect them (Christians, 2011; Russell, 2006). This study's findings suggested that participants' thinking aligns with this concept.

Participants generally held that the media play an important role in educating publics, in shaping discourse, and in providing a platform for discussing issues that are in the public's interest to understand, no matter how difficult the issues may be. Interviews also concurred with Corbo and Zweifeld (2013) in the context of suicide reporting; participants shared that discussion of suicide is increasingly becoming a topic of public interest where it once was not. Suicide is emerging as a "need to know" issue (Swaffield, 2011) and respondents spoke of the increasing need for awareness around suicide, and of wanting to change the social discourse from a focus on shame and criminality to a focus on a serious public health issue with messages of empathy, hope and recovery. These findings echoed the results of a similar study conducted by Collings and Kemp (2010), which suggested that in the context of pushing to report suicide, members of the media view themselves as "acting in the public good."

Guidelines as a set of considerations within existing bounds of journalism. While all participants shared the same perception that reporting suicide is in the public interest, and that the media has a responsibility to report it, interview data suggests a tension between the suicide reporting guidelines being perceived as a tool to serve the public in this way versus acting as a barrier to fulfilling this role. Participants stated that the guidelines are a useful resource in their ability to serve as an education piece to debunk previously held myths about suicide, for example, that it is something to be ashamed of or that there is no hope for recovery, and to provide a greater level of understanding around the core concepts of suicide contagion.

Participants noted that this kind of information is useful to reporters as suicide is an area of reporting that has, to date, been limited. Suicide reporting guidelines can, as J3 states:

"...establish a road sign as to what way you should go" particularly as reporters need this kind of information on the fly. The guidelines also have the potential to contribute to practical changes to

social discourse, for example by highlighting stigmatizing language that the media could move away from, such as ‘committed suicide.’ In this sense, participants found the suicide reporting guidelines to add to the discussion when a reporter is considering writing a story about suicide, and items can be taken as potential considerations within the bounds of journalistic practice and newsworthiness of the story. Similarly, Russell (2006, p. 234) states that good codes give journalists a starting point and a reason for discussion. They are not regarded as a prescriptive practice. As a set of considerations, the guidelines are able to support the media in serving the public in providing accurate depictions of the world, as Christians (2011) suggests is the media’s function. Participant E1 stated: “...the more information we have, the better job we’ll do.”

Guidelines as a barrier to reporting. However, participants stated that if the guidelines are strictly adhered to, they may not support their ability to serve the public by acting as a barrier to reporting and as an obstacle to informing the public, a key function of journalist identity (Deuze, 2005). As a barrier to reporting, participants stated that they did not feel that the voice and needs of the media, including the practicalities of reporting and the values of the culture of the media, were adequately represented in the guidelines. This lack of representation, participants shared, makes the guidelines difficult to apply, illustrating Bohanna and Wang’s (2012) conclusion that: “Any program involving the media industry must take into account the commercial, editorial, practical and professional contexts within which journalists operate” (p. 195).

Participants also shared a perception that the suicide reporting guidelines failed to take into account the current media environment, elements of which make following the guidelines difficult. Control over information and social discourse is no longer dominated by the mainstream media as it once was; rather, information is shared via social media, through multiple

news outlets as it goes viral, or public citizens get involved in the conversation. Furthermore, as the public becomes increasingly more aware of and open to discussions around mental illness and suicide, reporting these issues becomes ever more important. Participants shared concerns that the guidelines may be ‘anachronistic’ in today’s environment, and may not support the ability of the media to take the conversation around suicide further. Collings and Kemp (2010) similarly identified ‘reporting restrictions’ as a theme in their study, with interview participants sharing that the rules are difficult to apply as they don’t understand the media and may scare journalists away from wanting to report suicide altogether.

Guidelines as an obstacle to serving the public. Interviews also revealed that participants felt the guidelines do a disservice to the public. First, participants maintained that the guidelines tread on the ability of the media to independently report what is in the interest of the public to know. As Christians (2011) and Russell (2006, p. 31) argue, the media are responsible for providing fulsome and truthful information so that the public can develop informed opinions and make appropriate decisions. By limiting what can be reported, participants argued that the guidelines withhold valuable information about the potential gravity of untreated mental illness and the prevalence of suicide that could further inform the public. Moreover, participants found that these limitations may contribute to stigma and be harmful to the public by categorizing suicide in a particular fashion, i.e. as an issue that must be treated differently than other sensitive topics. Collings and Kemp (2010) reported a similar finding. A participant in their study stated the following: “...having these separate rules for suicide is like reinforcing the societal shame and taboo around it.” This perception was echoed in the questions around the research evidence supporting the link between media reporting and suicide contagion, as participants suggested that the guidelines may be inflating the risk of contagion, and turning

journalists off reporting at the expense of mass public awareness that could ultimately reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behaviour. Participants in the Collings and Kemp (2010) study held similar views, expressing reporting can potentially help those who may be considering suicide, and that: "...the media provides a context for children and young adults to learn and get the right messages" (p. 245).

RQ.2. How do media professionals describe their engagement in communication regarding the guidelines?

As explored in the literature review, excellence theory describes four models of communication that public relations practitioners employ; press agency, public information, one-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical communications models, with each model framed around the dimensions of direction and purpose (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Laskin, 2009). In interviews, participants discussed engagement in communication regarding the suicide reporting guidelines with two distinct groups: with the health organizations who developed the guidelines, and the media professionals with whom they work.

Communication with health professionals. Through the lens of the four models of public relations, participants described their communication with health professionals as either non-existent or limited to what Grunig and Grunig (1992) would categorize as one-way and asymmetrical. Most participants reported learning about the suicide reporting guidelines from their own research or from their internal professional networks such as peers, editors, or organizational standards and practices manuals, stating that health professionals were largely absent from the learning process. Three participants also reported not ever having heard of the suicide reporting guidelines. Others were the targets of one-way communication strategies regarding the guidelines, including a one-pager distributed to journalists by a local suicide

prevention group, pamphlets given to journalists, and a policy paper published online. While these are important means of information dissemination, Grunig et al. (2002) argue they are insufficient in meaningfully affecting attitude, opinion and behaviour change (p. 307). In terms of direction, these strategies are one-way from health organizations to media publics, and do not allow for opportunities for clarification, challenging concepts, or deepening understanding. They are also asymmetrical, in that they do not seek to fit in with the needs and interests of their publics (Stacks & Watson, 2007); rather, participants perceived them to impose the agenda of health professionals.

Participants described issues with this type of engagement in a number of ways. While the pamphlets, policy paper and web-based articles provide insights into contagion research, several participants felt there was a lack of critical perspectives and recent research in these pieces to provide the naturally-inquisitive members of the media with enough information to develop informed opinions and explore options as they relate to suicide reporting. Guidelines, participants shared, also did not offer thorough enough explanations for journalists to feel justified in their use of guideline items. In an example, a respondent shared positive perceptions towards iterations of the guidelines that offered a rationale behind each guideline item. Furthermore, one participant shared that there lacked a sense of urgency in these communication modalities, and this lack of urgency or blunt communication of reality of suicide reporting may contribute to oversight or disregard from the media. Conversely, another felt that the guidelines inflated the risk of reporting suicide by citing outdated or one-sided research evidence regarding the issue. In addition, participants also conveyed that communication with health professionals was often limited to health organizations' communicating their criticism of particular reporting after the fact, which is reminiscent of Guttman and Thompson's (2011) criticism that health

communication strategies can suffer from ‘blaming and shaming’ tactics in their quest to change behaviour, which may be ineffective and unethical. The media described negative experiences with one-way and asymmetrical communication strategies. This outcome is in line with Larsson and Nohrstedt’s (2002) case study, which demonstrated that a perceived lack of communication, or communication that does not suit publics’ needs, fosters negative attitudes towards organizations.

Communication within professional networks. Participants were more able to speak of their engagement in communication regarding the suicide reporting guidelines with their professional networks. Participants largely reported learning of the guidelines from their editors, their peers and from respected media organizations, however the topic of suicide reporting was not determined to be a prominent feature in newsrooms. Corbo and Zweifel (2013) and Russell (2006, p. 117) similarly find that few newsrooms have specific protocols for addressing suicide, which may be a product of what Knowlton and Reader (2009) identified as a traditional standing order not to report suicide. The communication between and within professional networks displayed dimensions of both one-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical communication. One-way internal communication strategies included email reminders when a suicide had occurred, top-down directives from editors and organizations to change language or consider the context closely, organizational webinars on the standards for reporting suicide and newspaper articles published with commentary on how to report on suicide. While excellence theory suggests that these communication strategies may be ineffective in engendering attitude and behaviour change (Grunig, 2001; Grunig et al., 2002 p.307) as explored in the previous point, one editor stated that there was little opposition to internal guidelines around suicide reporting, as they came from the organization and reflected the language and culture of said organization,

as per the example E2 shared: “The Standards of Practice was clearly drafted with the guidelines, and because it’s our iteration in our Standards of Practice guidebook, there was wide acceptance among our journalists, no one really tested it.” Positive reception of these internal communication strategies was described. Journalist participants similarly reported more willingness to abide by directive if they are internally mandated, illustrating Russell’s (2006, p. 236) assertion that motivation for the adoption of codes of conduct is more powerful when it comes from within, and journalists can see that these codes are important to their editors and to their peers.

However, from interviews, it appeared that one-way and asymmetrical strategies are embedded within a professional culture of two-way and symmetrical communication. Media communication norms included a culture of discussion, emphasis on the consideration of context and meaning, consultation with peers and editors, continually balancing public interest against potential harm, and moral justification of issues as they arise. Participants stated that nothing is black and white in journalism, and the continual dialogue in reporting, drawing from experience and context, is what is most valuable in terms of learning new skills and approaching new stories.

RQ.3. Does engagement in communication affect media professionals’ perceptions of the guidelines?

Grunig (2001) and Grunig et al. (2002) suggest that two-way symmetrical communication can, through research and dialogue, bring about changes in ideas, attitudes and behaviours in both publics and organizations (p.307). In contrast, one-way and asymmetrical strategies fail to sufficiently engage publics in meaningful dialogue to understand one another and work towards mutually beneficial goals, such as, in this case, the responsible reporting of

suicide. This study's sample of media professionals describes their engagement in communication with the health organizations producing the guidelines as largely non-existent or one-way and asymmetrical. From the perspective of excellence theory, these approaches to communication may have contributed to negative perceptions from the media about the guidelines. However, as stated in RQ.1, editors and journalists view suicide reporting as an important part of their responsibility to the public, and see the guidelines as containing useful information that can inform reporting. Commentary about the potential to learn from health professionals through two-way symmetrical communication strategies underlines the importance of collaborative dialogue in creating, promoting and implementing the suicide reporting guidelines.

Limited understanding of publics. One-way strategies, as reported in RQ.2, failed to facilitate an adequate understanding of the media on the part of health organizations, fostering a lack of guideline usability. Many participants felt they did not see the voice of the media represented in the guidelines. Several participants linked this to a lack of applicability and credibility, as the practical realities, professional values, and existing strengths of the media were not considered. Excellence theory offers an explanation for this lack of understanding. Stacks and Watson (2007) argue that one-way and asymmetrical communication strategies fail to engage in environmental scanning and research related to publics prior to communication which, as Grunig et al. (2002 p.14) find, cannot develop an understanding of the public. L. Grunig (1992) states that organizations must undertake research on publics, such as their potential motivations to support or oppose an organization, before they become activist groups organizing around an issue to reduce the incidence of confrontation or conflict. This, the author states, does not happen overnight. Sustained engagement towards the development of positive relationships

between organizations and activist groups are key to uncovering the full picture of key publics (L. Grunig, 1992). The development of a foundational understanding of media culture, values and realities using two-way symmetrical communication may have resulted in the development and dissemination of guidelines that reflect the needs, priorities and language of the media. Grunig and Hon's (1999) research on the development and maintenance of positive relationships using communication also suggests that organizations make better strategic decisions, and see more support for decisions, when they listen to and collaborate with publics before making decisions, rather than trying to persuade publics to accept decisions after the fact. Russell (2006, p. 234) similarly finds that there is more acceptance among media professionals when they are more closely involved in the development of policies and procedures that affect them.

Lack of information. One-way strategies, as well as the absence of communication, did not offer journalists sufficient information to arrive at a conclusion of accepting the guidelines as an important practice as stated in RQ.2. As respondents shared, journalists value independence, resist being pushed in any one direction or toward advocating for a particular cause, and are liable to question norms and authorities. The lack of provision of criticism to contagion theory as it relates to the media, or of making transparent the questions around the validity and effectiveness of the guidelines in reducing contagion may have influenced a naturally inquisitive public to question the claims and form alternate opinions, such as questioning the role the media actually plays in suicide contagion. Grunig et al. (2002, p. 447) suggest that when publics are dissatisfied with the information they have received (or in this case, have not received), they may seek it elsewhere. In sum, one-way strategies may not offer opportunities for clarification or deepening understanding of the organization's perspective on an issue, and information sought elsewhere may not be representative of the organization's stance or goals. The lack of

information communicated to the media may also have influenced guideline use, as the guidelines are not seen an effective tool in reducing contagion.

Failure to establish guideline goals. Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 22) and Plowman (2007) state that one of the goals of an effective communication strategy is to achieve mutual understanding, or common ground, between parties. Negative attitudes from the media towards the guidelines may have been fostered by the one-way communication strategies that failed to develop mutual understanding and establish shared goals related to the intention of the guidelines. While both health organizations and media publics want to raise awareness and reduce suicide rates, interviews revealed a tension in what the two parties perceive as the most appropriate course of action to achieve these goals. Indeed, as explored in the literature review, Grunig and colleagues suggest that two-way and symmetrical communication practices are more effective in facilitating organizational goal attainment. Grunig et al. (2002, p. 10) state that organizations are effective when they attain goals, but that goals must be appropriate for publics as well. Participants expressed a view that the guidelines encourage journalists to refrain from suicide reporting to protect vulnerable individuals, but argued that it may be more beneficial to raise mass public awareness. Moreover, while the guidelines have been developed with the intention of increasing responsible dialogue around mental illness and suicide, participants reported an uncertainty how to do this fully and truthfully without talking about suicide openly, as J3 shared: "...how do we cover any mental illness if you can cover that mental illness up until this point [suicide], but if the end result is suicide, we don't want you to cover that." Botan and Taylor (2004) argue that publics are essential co-creators of meaning and must therefore be considered partners in the development of ideas and decisions if they are to understand the meaning of policies, products and decisions as organizations do. These authors suggest that two-

way symmetrical communication is the most prominent co-creational model and that it can facilitate the development of shared meaning, interpretation and goals (Botan & Taylor, 2004). The negative perceptions related to the lack of common goals is also supported by Grunig's (2001) suggestion that engagement in dialogue through two-way symmetrical communication is necessary for uncovering what is moral and, as Childers (1989) notes, what is for the good of society. Publics, in this case the media, expressed uncertainty about what is best in terms of the guidelines; reducing contagion, or raising awareness. Furthermore, participants shared that public interest tends to trump everything, and it is journalists and editors who, internally and on a case-by-case basis, determine what is in the public interest. As Grunig (2001) states, neither side can know which position is more reasonable or more moral without engaging in dialogue.

Power imbalances. Finally, in failing to engage in dialogue through strategic communication, the perception of power imbalances may have been established. Participants reported perceiving the guidelines as condescending from health professionals towards the media, as J5 shared: "...I find them condescending...the whole tone of them is patronizing." These sentiments suggest participants did not feel that health professionals viewed them as individuals with the capacity to manage the reporting of difficult subject matter on their own. Grunig's (1992) assertion that one-way, asymmetrical communication operates on the assumption that organizations know best offers a communication-oriented reasoning for this sentiment. The author finds that as dialogue and understanding are not sought as priorities in one-way and asymmetrical communication strategies, these 'organization knows best' approaches can lead to socially irresponsible and ineffective action (Grunig, 1992), for example, promoting guidelines that are poorly received by the intended users. In addition, power imbalances may have been established through what one participant called the 'imposition' of

the guidelines. Stacks and Watson (2007) explain that one-way and asymmetrical strategies have, at their core, a purpose to dominate the environment, while two-way symmetrical communication strategies seek to have organization cooperating with their constituencies. Participant J6 noted that it is not an effective strategy to impose directives as an outsider: "...it seems like they wrote it and they just expected people to follow the rules, it doesn't make any sense. You don't go into another industry and tell them what to do." Indeed, Childers (1989), Grunig (1992) and Grunig et al. (2002, p. 22) argue that publics whose legitimacy is acknowledged and who are treated as equals are more likely to support and less likely to oppose organizations than those publics who are treated as equals.

The importance of two-way symmetrical communication. The importance of two-way symmetrical communication in terms of suicide reporting and the suicide reporting guidelines is underscored by participants' descriptions of engagement in communication with professional peers, and their optimism about two-way symmetrical communication with health professionals. While participants identified negative elements and outcomes in their past communication with health organizations, they spoke positively about their engagement in dialogue, debate and discussion with their professional seniors and peers regarding the suicide reporting guidelines. As stated in RQ.2, participants reported that two-way symmetrical communication is inherent in the media profession, as stories are envisioned, written, edited and published in a collaborative manner, as J8 shares: "There's an ongoing dialogue within our office about treating stuff, like with an editor, how you're going to treat something." It is the discussion, participants stated, that is key to uncovering what is the most appropriate course of action, i.e. what it is in the public interest. In addition, participants reported that two-way symmetrical communication strategies with health professionals would suit their learning needs and facilitate the necessary

collaboration with health professionals, whom participants described as having undeniable expertise. Such strategies included face to face presentations or workshops delivered by health professionals in newsrooms, trainings targeted to editors or health reporters, health partnerships with respected media organizations such as the Canadian Journalism Foundation or for the development of a section in the Canadian Press Style Guide in collaboration with CP writers. These strategies, excellence theory suggests, would facilitate opportunities for active dialogue, mutual understanding (Rhee, 2007), mutual influence (Grunig et al., 2002 p. 551; Grunig and Hon, 1999), and analyzing ethical considerations (Grunig et al., 2002 p. 306), which can begin to address some of the tensions and negative perceptions experienced by the media. In addition, participants shared that this is an opportunity for health professionals to engage in targeted communication about the guidelines through strategic outreach to journalists in the moment, as J8 shared:

J8: ...just imagine if, around the Rehteah Parsons story, if [we'd] gotten an email from the communications department of [health organizations] saying 'on the issue of suicide we have this person to speak to it about the impact on other children and the copycat effect. Please consider including this in your reporting, if you can't speak to our expert who is available at this time at this address, please consider these guidelines.' That would be really helpful on any given day... communications can be very targeted and very effective.

While there are negative perceptions about the guidelines as they currently exist, there is optimism about opportunities for reframing the conversation to facilitate deeper understanding on each parties' behalf as to the best way to serve mass media audiences.

Limitations of two-way symmetrical communication. It is important to note that participants did not view two-way symmetrical communication strategies to be appropriate in

every context. Grunig (2001) and Childers (1989) suggest that two-way symmetrical communication strategies are more likely to achieve idea, attitude and behaviour change, and therefore more desired outcomes for organizations. However, the use of one-way strategies within the media environment, including top-down directives from organizations and editors, webinars and ad-hoc email reminders, may suit media learning needs and professional realities, such as wanting to hear information from those in respected positions and accessing quick reference information for reporting on a deadline. Grunig et al. (2002) concede that two-way symmetrical communication strategies may not be appropriate in every scenario, for example, when there are fundamental ideological differences, societal dynamics, or political or institutional considerations (pp. 312-313). Given the importance of professional influences as described in the results, the internal support for one-way asymmetrical communication strategies may indicate that professional networks may be more important and more influential in terms of attitude and behaviour change than communication strategies. In discussing media codes of conduct, Russell (2006, p. 236) states that codes need to be internal. They will not work if they are handed down from governments or media monitoring bodies, echoing one of the reservations of this study's participants towards the guidelines.

Furthermore, some participants shared that the feasibility of a more formal, longer-term relationship, which Grunig and Hon (1999) argues is the foundation for positive outcomes, may not be realistic given the institutional barriers faced by journalists, such as time and financial constraints, and the immediacy of the media (Deuze, 2005). While interviews suggested that sustained relationships may not suit the media, positive relationships with health organizations based on ad hoc outreach and consultation, as envisioned by participant J8, may suit the media's needs and serve to support the sustainability of guideline implementation. This finding reflects

the description by Pirkis et al. (2006a) of Australia's exemplary development and implementation strategy, which included ad-hoc advice and working with editors and senior reporters to adapt guidelines internally. Skehan et al. (2006) found, however, that some journalists in Australia felt that on-going training and information sharing between health organizations and the media would be effective in sustaining guideline use. Participants in this study suggested that a more collaborative approach upfront, as opposed to throughout the course of implementation might be more effective.

Excellence theory may also be limited in its ability to explain the diversity of perspectives held by journalists. While Excellence theory can offer communication and relationship-related dimensions to participants' attitudes, journalist may be more influenced by other factors. Negative beliefs may be attributed more to core ideological values, such as autonomy, which largely rejects extra-journalistic input in favour of the "overriding concern to be autonomous and tell the story you want to (Deuze, 2005, p. 448). They may also be influenced by the need to stay objective (Deuze, 2005) and to remain the 'watchdog' (Russell, 2006, p. 30), which would preclude journalists from taking sides or becoming an actor. Attitudes may also be influenced by acceptance or rejection of media effects theory. If journalists believe that media effects are negligible, then it follows that they would feel guidelines are irrelevant. Participants in the study expressed concern about the extent to which media plays a role in contagion, echoing the critics of media effects theory who suggest research is only correlational in nature (Gauntlett, 1998; Perse, 2001). However, these entrenched values and beliefs illustrate the need for communication and collaboration between health and media professionals in order to create common values and shared goals. Excellence theory indicates that working with activists, or those with opposing values or visions to the organization, actually strengthen an organization's

decisions, products and policies, as critical voices can be understood and taken into account, and concepts of what is right or wrong may be articulated more clearly (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 316; L. Grunig, 1992).

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Summary of Findings

As suggested by Pirkis et al. (2006a) in the literature review, little is currently known about the factors that influence the use of the suicide reporting guidelines by members of the media. This study has analyzed media professionals' attitudes and opinions toward suicide reporting guidelines and has explored whether their perception of engagement in communication, including developing, learning about and implementing the guidelines, has influenced these attitudes and opinions. The findings revealed that while there is unanimous support for the need to report suicide, there are both positive and negative attitudes towards the suicide reporting guidelines; attitudes which may have been influenced by the predominantly one-way and asymmetrical communication strategies used to develop and disseminate the guidelines. This finding echoes Pirkis et al. (2006a), who state that the use of mass mail-outs and online availability without targeted communication strategies may be ineffective for meaningful guideline implementation. Participants related their negative attitudes toward the guidelines to elements such as lack of usability, lack of media representation, lack of flexibility, failure to consider the current environment of reporting, and more.

The excellence theory framework suggests that the lack of two-way symmetrical communication strategies used to engage the media in developing, learning about and using the guidelines may have facilitated these negative attitudes by failing to develop an adequate understanding of the media on the part of health organizations, failing to provide critical perspectives, failing to create shared meaning or common goals, and establishing unequal power balances from the outset. These results are consistent with Russell (2006) and international research in Austria, Australia and New Zealand (Bohanna & Wang, 2012) that suggests that

media engagement in the collaborative development and dissemination of guidelines: "...will be vital to effective implementation" (Collings & Kemp, 2010). Furthermore, interviews suggested that participants hold their internal professional networks, including editors, peers and media organizations, in high regard. This finding suggests that senior editors, targeted reporters and respected organizations are crucial partners to engage in supporting the development and implementation of the guidelines throughout the media profession.

Thesis Limitations

There were several limitations to the study that must be clarified. The sample of participants was limited in size due to time and resource constraints on the part of researcher, which may have failed to capture different perspectives on the issues. Furthermore, as described in the methodology, the sample was derived using the snowball sampling/response-driven sampling strategy, which limited the identification of potential interviewees to the existing networks of interviewed participants. This restricted the sample to participants with similar demographics, education, experience and working at similar organizations, excluding perspectives held by, for example, those working in tabloids, writing for francophone or First Nations readers, or individuals working in small communities. Differences in the characteristics of the participants, such as length of time in the media, or and editor versus a journalist, and their views on the guidelines were also outside the scope of the study, but could be important future research. In addition, communication with the Canadian Psychiatric Association regarding their intended engagement and communication plans may have strengthened the researcher's understanding of the development of the Canadian suicide reporting guidelines. However, as the study focused on journalist perceptions, this was beyond the scope of the study. Further research into the match between the intention and reception of the guidelines may be warranted.

Research, Practice and Policy Implications

Future research into the factors that support or hinder guidelines use in the media across a varied swath of participants, as well as research into the extent to which guidelines actually translate in the desired practice, is warranted to develop a comprehensive understanding of guideline implementation and practice sustainability. If health organizations are to continue to push for changes to suicide reporting, research into the validity of the guidelines in actually affecting suicide contagion will also be necessary. The study also suggests the use of public relations theory to address gaps in communication across sectors. While literature relating to the use of public relations theory in health communication is limited, the study suggests that the use of public relations theory can identify important dimensions related to cross-sector communication, such the importance of relationships, of perceptions, and common understanding, that health communication models may not uncover.

The positive attitudes of reporters towards reporting suicide suggest the importance of continuing efforts to improve the way suicide is treated in the media. Although there are tensions in the current status of suicide reporting, health organizations must engage the media in dialogue and collaboration in order to produce useable content that will best serve the general public. In practice, for example, health professionals working with editors to develop organization-specific adaptations of the guidelines would ensure the right information is provided and could strengthen inter-professional communication of the importance of responsible suicide reporting. This may increase the likelihood that they are used by journalists, as journalists hold the editors' and the organizations' directives in high esteem.

Suicide prevention is increasingly being approached from a community-mobilization perspective, capitalizing on all the strengths and resources within a community. It is imperative,

therefore, that health organizations and policymakers effectively engage this prominent community voice, so as to harness its power in influencing social discourse to reduce the stigma associated with suicide and to reduce suicide rates more broadly.

References

- Bohanna, I., & Wang, X. (2012). Media guidelines for the responsible reporting of suicide: A review of effectiveness. *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 33(4), 190-198. doi:10.1027/0227-5910/a000137
- Bonneville, L., Grosjean, S., & Lagacé, M. (2007). *Introduction aux méthodes de recherche en communication*. Montreal, QC: Les Éditions de la Chenelière inc.
- Botan, C., & Taylor, M. (2004). Public relations: State of the field. *Journal of Communication*, 54(4), 645-661. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02649.x
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d.). Suicide Statistics. Retrieved from http://toronto.cmha.ca/mental_health/suicide-statistics/#.Um7k2SR_fIY
- Casey, L. (2011, Dec 22). Suicide Notes. *Ryerson Review of Journalism*. Retrieved from <http://www.rrj.ca/m11766/>
- Chan, Z., Fung, Y., & Chien, W. (2013). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only undertaken in the data collection and analysis process? *The Qualitative Report*, 18(30), 1-9. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/chan59.pdf>
- Cheng, M. (2014). Attach to Me if You Can: Why it's So Hard to Parent Today's Children and Youth [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.drcheng.ca/page1/page1.html>
- Childers, L. (1989). J. Grunig's asymmetrical and symmetrical models of public relations: Contrasting features and ethical dimensions. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 32(2), 86-93. doi:0361-1434/89/0600-0086\$01.00
- Christians, C. (2011). Journalism ethics in theory and practice. In G. Cheney, S. May & D.

- Munshi (Eds.), *The Handbook of Communication Ethics* (pp. 190-204). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Colcannon, T., Meissener, P., Grunbaum, J., McElwee, N., Guise, J., Santa, J., Conway, P., Daudelin, D., Morrato, E., & Leslie, L. (2012). A new taxonomy for stakeholder engagement in patient-centered outcomes research. *Journal for General Internal Medicine, 91*(8), 985. doi:10.1007/s11606-012-2037-1
- Collings, S., & Kemp, C. (2010). Death knocks, professional practice, and the public good: The media experience of suicide reporting in New Zealand. *Social Science & Medicine, 71*(2), 244-248. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.03.017
- Cooper, A. (2009). Two-way communication: A win-win model for facing activist pressure. A case study on McDonald's and Unilever's responses to Greenpeace (unpublished master's thesis). Ball State University, Indiana.
- Corbo, A., & Zweifel, K. (2013). Sensationalism or sensitivity: Reporting suicide cases in the news media. *Studies in Communication Science, 13*(1), 67-74.
doi:10.1016/j.scoms.2013.04.012
- Coulson, M. (2012, April 24). Reporting on Suicide. *Journomel.com*. Retrieved from <http://journomel.com/2012/04/24/reporting-suicides/>
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches, Third Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches, Third Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- de Leo, D., & Vijayakumar, L. (2008). Preventing suicide: A resource for media professionals.

Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, World Health Organization.

Retrieved from World Health Organization website:

www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/resource_media.pdf

Editorial: Teen suicide, contagion and the news media. [Editorial]. (2012). *The Globe and*

Mail. Retrieved from [http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/editorials/teen-](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/editorials/teen-suicide-contagion-and-the-news-media/article6116592/#dashboard/follows/)

[suicide-contagion-and-the-news-media/article6116592/#dashboard/follows/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/editorials/teen-suicide-contagion-and-the-news-media/article6116592/#dashboard/follows/)

Etzersdorfer, E., & Sonneck, G. (1998). Preventing suicide by influencing mass-media reporting:

The Viennese experience 1980-1996. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 4(1), 64-74.

doi:10.1023/A:1009691903261

Flick, U. (2002). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research, Second Edition*. London, UK: Sage

Publications, Inc.

Foster, D., & Jonker, J. (2005). Stakeholder relationships: The dialogue of engagement.

Corporate Governance, 5(5), 51-57. doi:10.1108/14720100510630059

Gable, C., & Shireman, B. (2005). Stakeholder engagement: A three-phase methodology.

Environment Quality Management, 14, 9-24. doi:10.1002/tqem.20044

Graham, I. D., Logan, J., Harrison, M. B., Straus, S. E., Tetroe, J., Caswell, W., & Robinson, N.

(2006). Lost in knowledge translation: Time for a map? *Journal of Continuing Education*

in the Health Professions, 26(1), 13-24. doi:10.1002/chp.47

Goldbloom, D., & Picard, A. (2012, Dec 12). Media Portrayal of Mental Illness.

Longwoods Breakfast with Chiefs. Retrieved from [http://www.longwoods.com/audio-](http://www.longwoods.com/audio-video/all/2/5703)

[video/all/2/5703](http://www.longwoods.com/audio-video/all/2/5703)

Goodman, L. (2011). Comment: On respondent-driven sampling and snowball sampling in hard-

to-reach populations and snowball sampling not in hard-to-reach populations.

Sociological Methodology, 41, 357-353. Retrieved from

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41336926>

Gould, M., Jamieson, P., & Romer, D. (2003). Media contagion and suicide among the young. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46(9), 1269-1284.

doi: 10.1177/0002764202250670

Grunig, J. (2001). Two-way symmetrical public relations: Past, present and future. In R. Heath & G. Vasquez (Eds.), *The Handbook of Public Relations* (pp. 11-31). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Grunig, J., Grunig, L., & Dozier, D. (2002). *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations: A Study of Communication Management in Three Countries*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Grunig, J., & Grunig, L. (1992). Models of public relations and communication. In J. Grunig, D. Dozier, W. Ehling, L. Grunig, F. Repper & J. White (Eds.), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 327-356). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Grunig, J., Grunig, L., & Dozier, D. (2002). *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations: A Study of Communication Management in Three Countries*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Grunig, J., Grunig, L., & Ehling, W. (1992). What is an effective organization? In J. Grunig, D. Dozier, W. Ehling, L. Grunig, F. Repper & J. White (Eds.), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 65-90). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence

- Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. Grunig, J., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Grunig, J., & Repper, F. (1992). Strategic management, publics, and issues. In J. Grunig, D. Dozier, W. Ehling, L. Grunig, F. Repper & J. White (Eds.), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 117-158). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Grunig, J., & White, J. (1992). The effect of worldviews on public relations theory and practice. In J. Grunig, D. Dozier, W. Ehling, L. Grunig, F. Repper & J. White (Eds.), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 31-64). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Grunig, L. (1992). Activism: How it limits the effectiveness of organizations and how excellent public relations departments respond. In J. Grunig, D. Dozier, W. Ehling, L. Grunig, F. Repper & J. White (Eds.), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 503-530). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Guttman, N., & Thompson, T. (2011). Ethics in health communication. In G. Cheney, S. May & D. Munshi (Eds.), *The Handbook of Communication Ethics* (pp. 293-308). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Handcock, M., & Gile, K. (2011). Comment: On the concept of snowball sampling. *Sociological Methodology*, 41(1), 367-371. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9531.2011.01243.x
- Hawton, K., Saunders, K., & O'Connor, R. (2012). Self-harm and suicide in adolescents. *The Lancet*, 379(9834), 2373-2382. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60322-5
- Himmelboim, I., & Limor, Y. (2010). Media institutions: New organizations, and the journalistic

- social role worldwide: A cross-national and cross-organizational study of codes of ethics. *Mass Communication and Society*, 14(1), 71-92. doi:10.1080/15205430903349719
- Hitzler, R., & Eberle, T. (2004). Phenomenological life-world analysis. In U. Flick, E. von Kardoff & I. Steinke (Eds.), *A Companion to Qualitative Research* (pp. 67-71). London, UK: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Hon, L., & Grunig, J. (1999). Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations. *The Institute for Public Relations*. Retrieved from http://www.aco.nato.int/resources/9/conference%202011/guidelines_measuring_relationships%5B1%5D.pdf
- Hopf, C. (2004). Qualitative interviews: An overview. In U. Flick, E. von Kardoff & I. Steinke (Eds.), *A Companion to Qualitative Research* (pp. 203-208). London, UK: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Huang, Y. (2004). Is symmetrical communication ethical and effective? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 53(4), 333-352. doi:10.1023/B:BUSI.0000043494.17425.c6
- Hung, C. (2007). Towards the theory of relationship management in public relations: How to cultivate quality relationships? In J. Grunig, L. Grunig & E. Toth (Eds.), *The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp.443-476). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Jamieson, P., Jamieson, K., & Romer, D. (2003). The responsible reporting of suicide in print journalism. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46(12), 1643-1660. doi: 10.1177/0002764203254620
- Johansson, L., Lindqvist, P., & Eriksson, A. (2006). Teenage suicide cluster formation and

- contagion: Implications for primary care. *BMC Family Practice*, 7(32), 1-5.
doi:10.1186/1471-2296-7-32
- Kelly, K., Laskin, A., & Rosenstein, G. (2010). Investor relations: Two-way symmetrical practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22(2), 182-208. doi: 10.1080/10627261003601630
- Kimball, A. (2013, June 27). The problem of suicide and how we talk about it. *Random House of Canada; Hazlitt* [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.randomhouse.ca/hazlitt/feature/problem-suicide-and-how-we-talk-about-it>
- Knowlton, S., & Reader, B. (2009). *Moral Reasoning for Journalists, Second Edition*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Kutcher, S., & Chehil, S. (2012). *Suicide Risk Management: A Manual for Health Professionals*. Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lahey, J. (2009, October). CPA suicide reporting guidelines heat up the news. *Canadian Psychiatry Aujourd'hui*, 5(5). Retrieved from <http://publications.cpa-apc.org/browse/documents/485>
- Larsson, L., & Nohrstedt, S. (2002). Does public relations make a difference? A comparative analysis of two major Swedish crises. In D. Moss & B. DeSantos (Eds.), *Public Relations Cases and Readings: International Perspectives* (pp. 113-129). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Laskin, A. (2012). Public relations scales: Advancing excellence theory. *Journal of Communication Management*, 16(4), 355-370. doi:10.1108/13632541211278996

Laskin, A. (2009). The evolution of models of public relations: An outsider's perspective.

Journal of Communication Management, 13(1), 57-54. doi:10.1108/13632540910931382

Ledingham, J., & Bruning, S. (1998). Relationship management in public relations: Dimensions of an organization-public relationship. *Public Relations Review*, 24(1), 55-65.

doi:10.1016/S0363-8111(98)80020-9

Leeper, K., & Leeper, R. (2006). Crisis in the college/university relationship with the community. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 12(3), 129-142.

doi:10.1300/J057v12n03_08

Leitchy, G., & Springston, J. (1993). Reconsidering public relations models. *Public Relations Review*, 19(4), 327-339. doi:10.1016/0363-8111(93)90055-H

Lester, S. (1999). *An Introduction to Phenomenological Research*. Taunton, UK: Stan Lester Developments. Retrieved from www.sld.demon.co.uk/resmethy.pdf

Lincoln, Y. (2002). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Qualitative Inquiry Reader* (pp. 326-346). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Lowman, H. (2013, May 8). The challenges of reporting suicide. *The Inside Agenda Blog* [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://theagenda.tv.org/blog/agenda-blogs/challenges-reporting-suicide>

Manion, I. (2014). Youth Suicide Risk Management, Prevention and Postvention [PowerPoint slides].

Mayan, M. (2009). *Essentials of Qualitative Inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.

McKeon, L. (2011, Sept 13). Media and the hard truths about suicide. *The Canadian Journalism Project* [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://j-source.ca/article/media-and-hard-truth->

[about-suicides](#)

- Mahoney, J. (2010). Strategic communication and anti-smoking campaigns. *Public Communication Review*, 1(2), 33-48. Retrieved from <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/pcr/article/viewFile/1868/1915>
- McCurdy, P. (2011). The 'story' in a risk society: A case study of the BBC and the 'riskiness' of journalism. *Journal of Media Practice*, 12, 173-188. doi:10.1386/jmpr.12.2.173_1
- Melhum, L. (2004). A suicide prevention strategy for England. *Crisis*, 25(2), 69-73. doi: 10.1027/0227-5910.25.2.69
- Mercy, J., Kresnow, M., O'Carroll, P., Lee, R., Powell, K., Potter, L., Swann, A., Frankowski, R., & Bayer, T. (2001). Is suicide contagious? A study of the relation between exposure to the suicidal behavior of others and nearly lethal suicide attempts. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 154(2), 120-127. doi:10.1093/aje/154.2.120
- Merkens, H. (2004). Selection procedures, sampling, case construction. In U. Flick, E. von Kardoff & I. Steinke (Eds.), *A Companion to Qualitative Research* (pp. 165-171). London, UK: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Moffat, L. (2007). *Knowledge exchange in health promotion: Theoretical models and examples*. Ottawa: Gibson Library Connections, Inc. Retrieved from <http://catalogue.bib.uottawa.ca/html/item.jsp?item=b3595082&language=en>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Murphy, P. (1991). The limits of symmetry: A game theory approach to symmetric and asymmetric public relations. *Public Relations Research Annual*, 3(1), 115-131. doi:10.1207/s1532754xjpr0301-4_5

- Muturi, N. (2005). Cultural considerations in HIV/AIDS communication and prevention in Kenya. *Journal of Health Communication, 10*(1), 77-98. Retrieved from <http://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2097/4939/MuturiJHC2005.pdf?sequence=3>
- Nepon, J., Fotti, S., Katz, L., & Sareen, J. (2009). Media guidelines for reporting suicide. *The Canadian Psychiatric Association*. Retrieved from <http://publications.cpa-apc.org/media.php?mid=733&xwm=true>
- Niederkrötenhaler, T., & Sonneck, G. (2007). Assessing the impact of media guidelines for reporting on suicides in Austria: Interrupted time series analysis. *Australasian Psychiatry, 41*(5), 419-428. doi:10.1080/00048670701266680
- Pandey, G. (2011). Neurobiology of adult and teenage suicide. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry, 4*(1), 2-13. doi:[10.1016/j.ajp.2011.01.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2011.01.008)
- Picard, A. (2009, Sept 17). Burying the story won't stop suicide. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-fitness/burying-the-story-wont-stop-suicide/article790267/#dashboard/follows/>
- Pirkis, J., & Blood, R. (2001). Suicide and the media. Part 1: Reportage in nonfictional media. *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention, 22*(4), 146-154. doi:10.1027//0227-5910.22.4.146
- Pirkis, J., Blood, W., Beautrais, A., Burgess, P., & Skehan, J. (2006). Media guidelines on the reporting of suicide. *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention, 27*(2), 82-87. doi:10.1027/0227-5910.27.2.82
- Pirkis, J., Burgess, P., Francis, C., Blood, W., & Jolley, J. (2006). The relationship between media reporting of suicide and actual suicide in Australia. *Social Science & Medicine, 62*(11), 2874-2886. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.11.033

Pirkis, J., Dare, A., Blood, W., Rankin, B., Williamson, M., Burgess, P., & Jolley, D. (2009).

Changes in media reporting of suicide in Australia between 2000/01 and 2006/07. *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 30(1), 25-33.

doi:10.1027/0227-5910.30.1.25

Pirkis, J. (2010). Contribution to knowledge about media professionals' experience with

reporting suicide: A commentary on Collings and Kemp. *Social Science and Medicine*,

7(1), 249-250. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.03.054

Pirkis J., Blood, W., Skehan, J., & Dare, A. (2010). Suicide in the news: Informing strategies to

improve the reporting of suicide. *Health Communication*, 25(6-7), 576-577.

doi:10.1080/10410236.2010.496771

Plowman, D. (2007). Public relations, conflict resolution and mediation. In J. Grunig, L.

Grunig & E. Toth (Eds.), *The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and*

Communication Management (pp. 85-102). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates,

Publishers.

Polkinghorne, D. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal*

of Counseling Psychology, 52(2), 137-145. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.137

Rhee, Y. (2007). Interpersonal communication as an element of symmetrical public relations:

A case study. In J. Grunig, L. Grunig & E. Toth (Eds.), *The Future of Excellence in*

Public Relations and Communication Management (pp.103-118). Mahwah, NJ:

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Roper, J. (2005). Symmetrical communication: Excellent public relations or a strategy for

hegemony? *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(1), 69-86.

doi:10.1207/s1532754xjpr1701_6

- Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. *Management Research Review*, 35(3-4), 260-271. doi:10.1108/01409171211210154
- Russell, N. (2006). *Morals and the Media: Ethics in Canadian Journalism, Second Edition*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Sallot, L., Lyon, L., Acosta-Alzuru, C., & Jones, K. (2003). From aardvark to zebra: Millennium analysis of theory development in public relations academic journals. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 15(1), 27-90. doi:10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1501_2
- Schiavo, R. (2007). *Health Communication From Theory to Practice*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Schmidt, C. (2004). The analysis of semi-structured interviews. In U. Flick, E. von Kardoff & I. Steinke (Eds.), *A Companion to Qualitative Research* (pp. 253-258). London, UK: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Skehan, J., Greenhalgh, S., Hazell, T., & Pirkis, J. (2006). Reach, awareness and uptake of media guidelines for reporting suicide and mental illness: An Australia perspective. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 8(4), 28-34. doi:10.1080/14623730.2006.9721749
- Sonneck, G., Etzerdorfer, E., & Nagel-Kuess, S. (1994). Imitative suicide on the Viennese subway. *Social Science & Medicine*, 38, 453-457. doi:10.1016/0277-9536(94)90447-2
- Stacks, D., & Watson, M. (2007). Two-way communication based on quantitative research and Measurement. In J. Grunig, L. Grunig & E. Toth (Eds.), *The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 67-84). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

- Statistics Canada. (2012). *Suicide and suicide rate, by sex and by age group*. Government of Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/hlth66a-eng.htm>
- Stewart, E., Manion, I., Davidson, S., & Cloutier, P. (2001). Children and adolescents with first emergency room presentations: Predictors of six-month outcome. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 40(5), 580-587.
[doi:10.1097/00004583-200105000-00018](https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-200105000-00018)
- Stoker, K., & Tusinski-Berg, L. (2006). Reconsidering public relations' infatuation with dialogue: Why engagement and reconciliation can be more ethical than symmetry and reciprocity. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 21(2-3), 156-176.
[doi:10.1207/s15327728jmme210&3_5](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327728jmme210&3_5)
- Swaffield, B. (2011). Making the case for what can and should be published. In G. Cheney, S. May & D. Munshi (Eds.), *The Handbook of Communication Ethics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Swanson, S. & Colman, I. (2013). Association between exposure to suicide and suicidality outcomes in youth. *Canadian Medical Journal Association*, 185(10), 870-878.
[doi:10.1503/cmaj.121377](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.121377)
- Shuy, R. (2002). In-person versus telephone interviewing. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context & Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Tobin, G., & Begley, C. (2004). Methodological rigor within a qualitative framework. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48(4), 388-396. Retrieved from http://202.28.25.163/mis/download/course/lec_566823_Tobin%20-%20Jan%202022.pdf

Tremonti, A.M. (2012, Dec 5). Covering suicide in the media. *CBC Radio*.

Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/episode/2012/12/05/covering-suicide-in-the-media/>

Tully, J., & Elsaka, N. (2004). *Suicide and the media: A study of the media response to suicide and the media: the reporting and portrayal of suicide in the media. A resource*. New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development. Retrieved from

<http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/suicide-and-media-study-media-response>

Williams, M. (2013, April 3). Staying silent on suicide: Fear of encouraging copycats if it is mentioned could be part of the problem. *Vue Weekly* [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://vueweekly.com/front/story/staying_silent_on_suicide/

White, J. (2005). Preventing suicide in youth: Taking action with imperfect

knowledge. *British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development*. Retrieved from

http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCgQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.childhealthpolicy.sfu.ca%2Fresearch_reports_08%2Frr_pdf%2FRR-9-05-fullreport.pdf&ei=adh9ULKqLufy0gGN2YCQDQ&usg=AFQjCNHno7KSWWgQJKF78SwdpATDMEjrPw

Yin, R. (2011). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Zenere, F. (2009). Suicide clusters and contagion. *Principal Leadership*, 10(2), 12-16. Retrieved from

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/Suicide_Clusters_NASSP_Sept_%2009.pdf

Appendix A: Canadian Psychiatric Association Suicide Reporting Guidelines

Taken from Nepon, Fotti, Katz, & Sareen, 2009

- Avoid the word “suicide” in the headline
- Avoid front-page coverage
- If on the front page, put the story below the fold
- Avoid excessive or repetitive coverage
- Avoid the idea that the suicide is unexplainable
- Avoid simplistic reasons for the suicide
- Convey warning signs of suicide behaviour
- Convey how to approach a suicidal person
- Convey alternatives to suicide (ex: treatment)
- Convey examples of a positive outcome of a suicidal crisis (ex: calling a hotline)
- Convey community resource information for those with suicidal ideation
- Avoid romanticized reasons for the suicide
- Avoid exciting reporting
- Avoid approval of the suicide
- Avoid admiration of the deceased
- Avoid details of the method or location of the suicide
- Avoid photos or videos of the deceased

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Name:

Organization:

Title:

Number of years in current role:

Number of years in profession:

Date of interview:

Researcher:

1. What do you know about the Canadian Psychiatric Association's suicide reporting guidelines?
2. When and how did you come to learn about the CPA guidelines?
 - a. Were you aware of guidelines in other countries prior to the 2009 publication of the guidelines?
3. Were you, or do you know of anyone from the media, consulted during the development of the guidelines?
 - a. If yes, in what manner were you or they consulted?
 - b. If not, do you think there would have been added value?
 - c. What could media consultation have added to the guidelines?
4. When you learned about them, were you given any information about suicide contagion?
 - a. What kind of information?
 - b. How was it delivered?
 - c. What do you think about suicide contagion as a concept?
5. Were you given any information or insights into how to apply them?
 - a. Were you given concrete examples?
 - b. Were you given opportunities to share barriers to applying them? If so, were these barriers addressed?
 - c. Were there organizational education efforts?
6. Do you think the guidelines are effective in reducing suicide contagion?
7. Do you or does your organization use them regularly?
 - a. Do you find other guidelines more useful? Why?
8. Do you think they are a useful resource when reporting a suicide?
 - a. What about them make them useable?
 - b. What about them makes them difficult to use?
 - c. Are there any changes you would make to them? To what end?

9. Do you think they are an appropriate fit to your practice? To your organization's practice?
 - a. How do they fit with your organization's existing code of ethics?
10. Do you or does your organization have on-going contact with the CPA or other health organizations regarding suicide contagion and the guidelines?
 - a. If yes, can you expand on what kind of relationship it is?
 - b. If not, do you think there would be value in regular contact?
11. Does the CPA or your organization provide any regular or ad hoc guidance on guideline use?
12. Does your organization address adherence to the guidelines in any way?
 - a. Are there rewards for adherence to guidelines?
 - b. Are there steps put in procedures in place for when guidelines are not followed?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix C: Coding Scheme

Phase 2: Codes

Code	# Refs.	Example
Accountable to public	8	<i>“We also have a public editor now who helps make the journalists more accountable to the public”</i>
Ad hoc nature of media	17	<i>“I think when it does come up it tends to be more on a case-by-case discussion about it”</i>
Adapting guidelines to organization	13	<i>“But when we do cover it, they definitely consult the guidelines and I think they take the best of them, I think that’s really the way to say it.</i>
Applicability issues	15	<i>“So we talked about the best guidelines in terms of us and how there was a lot of good in the CPA but it wasn’t perfect because it was a little less practical.</i>
Approached for consulting		<i>“No I don’t. It wasn’t me and I don’t know who they talked to. I assumed they talked to somebody, but I don’t know who”</i>
Awareness of guidelines	26	<i>“I would say that the only information I ever received about suicide contagion was only through actually looking it up on my own</i>
Buy in to contagion research	10	<i>“it seems like from what I’ve read, the research I’ve read, it exists, and I it just seems to me it’s how close you are to the person, like if it’s your brother or sister or father or son, then you’re more likely to, I believe in that. It seems like, especially among young people, the research says they are more impressionable, like if your friend in high school dies.</i>
Changing tone of suicide reporting	10	<i>“we used to just not do it, and then when we did we kind of felt guilty about it and did it badly. Now, now I think we do it better thoughtfully.”</i>
Codes in social language	6	<i>“So instead of making it a big deal, the police...it’s almost like an understood code, like ‘yes, we did take a body out of what the address is, but there is no reason to suspect foul play.’ The cops are basically going *wink wink* it was a suicide, but we’re not going to tell you it was a suicide but by virtue of the fact that we’re not investigating further, it was a suicide.</i>
Communications process	65	<i>“so the CPA sent pamphlets to every reporter when they published the guidelines, so that’s when I saw them</i>
Consultation in development	18	<i>“Well I know what they are and I know where they came from, but I don’t know how they were developed. I would be very surprised if any journalist was involved in developing them.</i>

Debate entering journalism school	4	<i>“now interestingly, after I wrote about [youth] and I went back a year to revisit his death, I was invited to speak to a Carleton University journalism class about suicide reporting.”</i>
Debate evolving naturally	18	<i>“I think the discussion is more fuelled by... I think to be honest much more fuelled by social pressures, by the social media.”</i>
Did not learn about from health	9	<i>“I think probably just in passing, more or less, heard of them, when you’re Googling about journalism and suicide or covering suicide, I think more in passing, but nothing in great detail.”</i>
Discussion most important	29	<i>“So you know I think the discussion is always the most important part for me.”</i>
Editor influence	21	<i>“And all I can say is that in terms of our internal structure is that when you go to the editor with why are we reporting this</i>
Engaged in public debate	3	<i>“I am aware that there is a debate around it”</i>
Exclusive sets of expertise	8	<i>“I know I’m not a psychiatrist or a psychologist, I don’t have expertise in those fields, and so you do your best, you gather your information in the best way you can and you present your information the way you think it should be presented</i>
Flexibility in rules in journalism	23	<i>“rules in journalism I always say are like French grammar rules, there are more exceptions than anything else”</i>
Guidelines as a discussion piece	4	<i>“I think it would add to the discussion because I feel that any sort of codes or guidelines, things like that that we have, perhaps don’t talk enough specifically about this particular issue.”</i>
Guidelines as an education piece	25	<i>“I think they’re important because they establish a road sign as to what way you should go”</i>
Guidelines as restrictions	6	<i>“here’s just a bunch of rules like don’t use suicide in the headlines, don’t do a bunch of stuff. Which is really just censorship, which I completely disagree with.”</i>
Guidelines contribute to stigma	7	<i>“So, yeah I don’t think it had any effect. If anything it’s detrimental. It just reinforces these old rules, they’re citing old research, they didn’t do any new research.”</i>
Guidelines contributing to change	8	<i>“And, you know, I hate that verb when people say that someone has “successfully” committed suicide, I think they are very good at getting rid of that kind of language”</i>
Guidelines lack understanding of media culture	15	<i>“So there’s a lot of checks and balances that go on inside newsrooms that these particular guidelines</i>

		<i>completely ignore.”</i>
Hiding suicide is harmful	11	<i>“I feel as though the greater risk is having people be completely uninformed about some of these issues, or there being a void where no discussion is going on”</i>
Influence of internal culture	25	<i>“he’s written a few pieces on how we cover suicide even so that has much more influence on us because its internal and its much more direct, you know written by journalists for journalists”</i>
Internal checks and balances	23	<i>“I think that what happens, generally like I said before, is that you go ok there’s a suicide are we reporting it, then one reporter may say, ‘you know what, this is one suicide that we should report and here’s why.’”</i>
Knowledge from reporting experience	19	<i>“So that’ll be a lot more effective, I think, instead of doctors or psychiatrists, the people who’ve never worked in a newsroom or written an article telling people what to do.”</i>
Lack of formal organizational culture around suicide	10	<i>“We have codes of conduct and things like that for how we’re supposed to conduct ourselves, but in terms of the reporting guidelines for suicide, I’ve never been given any sort of mandate or instruction”</i>
Learning in newsroom	5	<i>“I think we try and do it informally. An old coot like me who will talk to the younger reporters if they are doing their first story on suicide.”</i>
Media culture	41	<i>“So obviously for journalists, the biggest thing they’re on about is independence in everything they do”</i>
Media framing suicide	18	<i>“Pretty much, yeah. Trying to think of the last few times, it’s always either linked to mental illness, bullying, harassment, crime.”</i>
Media role in social dialogue	6	<i>“You can talk about whatever you want, and people do now with Twitter and Facebook and people making their own websites, but the media still acts as an amplifier”</i>
Media not always in control of dialogue	11	<i>“there are communities of all kinds on the web that don’t follow these rules in any way shape or form,”</i>
Medical values vs. media values	13	<i>“I suspect that we have two very different interests when it comes to actually reporting”</i>
Newsworthiness	9	<i>“Suicide is a very tragic and very private thing, but sometimes there are aspects of it that are newsworthy”</i>
No recognition of sensitive stories	7	<i>“I don’t think there are any rewards for adhering to guidelines in any way, but there’s certainly reprimand, either informal or formal if you don’t”</i>
Not how to represent to journalists	3	<i>“I wouldn’t write them the same but who cares what I think.”</i>

Organizational guidelines more influential	11	<i>“we have our own stylebooks and what’s more influential is what’s in our stylebook and that’s changed quite dramatically over the last few years”</i>
Other	15	<i>“I would say that most suicides are like that. They happen in very lonely, far away places and we don’t cover them. I’m not sure if this is right or not”.</i>
Overlap between guidelines and organizational ethics	10	<i>“I think the gist of both of them is the same that’s why I don’t have a real problem with the guideline”</i>
Perception of value of guidelines	20	<i>“But then there are other aspects of them that we do follow and that are hugely beneficial.</i>
Practical considerations of media culture	33	<i>“You know I think a lot of the CPA stuff is naïve to be honest you know they have this whole list of ‘oh that should be done in each story’ and its just not going to happen, stories aren’t ten thousand words long”</i>
Questions about research interpretation	5	<i>“Yeah, I feel like that evidence ten years ago would have been like the media causing the spike in suicide rates, whereas now it’s more like these people are suffering anyway and now they’re calling out for help. It seems like the way some people drop conclusions”</i>
Reporting in public interest	32	<i>“think that for a long time the general consensus was that often suicide reporting was not in the public interest, regardless of the circumstances, whereas I think now, and I think for myself certainly, there are definitely cases to be made.”</i>
Respecting families in reporting	14	<i>“They knew too that the Richardsons had found inspiration from their story. It made a really horrible horrible situation slightly more tolerable</i>
Responsibility of media	21	<i>“I think where we disagree is that the media just shouldn’t do things if its going to cause potential harm and you know I think that we just have to go along with the business and there’s going to be benefits from what we do and sometimes there will be harm but, and you know, that’s life”</i>
Rules not explained	9	<i>“that was my impression anyway, whether that was the case or whether that was the reason for the ban on reporting suicides I don’t think I ever knew, I don’t think anyone ever explicitly told me.”</i>
Sensitivity without guidelines	24	<i>“But if you have ordinary people who aren’t used to dealing with news media and they don’t perhaps understand the ramifications of talking to news media, you have to minimize any harm that might come to them by what you write and what you publish”</i>
Skeptical about research	21	<i>“I think over the years I have become more cautious about it and a little more doubtful about it”</i>

Social media	10	<i>“Suicide is a part of life. It’s actually fairly common when you compare it to the other things that happen that journalists write about all the time, and people are talking about it anyway on social media and other areas”</i>
Society more open now	8	<i>“I think we live in almost a post privacy age so people are much more open to talk about these thing”</i>
Suicide as different case	3	<i>“The advice is useful, it signals a requirement to look at stories differently than others ones you do.”</i>
Suicide myths	6	<i>“It can strike the poor, the educated, it can affect anybody, so the more information that’s out there, the more people try to talk about it within the proper confines, I think that would help, because the media is a primary source of information for many people and having intelligent convo and discourse about these things is important.”</i>
Tone of guidelines	17	<i>“the whole tone of them to me, and the way I received them, is that if you sweep it under the rug, that’s the best approach”</i>
Traditional rules around suicide reporting	29	<i>“There was a general rule in newspapers, it was then and largely still is now, is that we don’t cover suicides except in exceptional circumstances.”</i>
Uncommon topic	4	<i>“but I don’t think that overall we do much reporting on it anyway. So I think that’s part of it. It doesn’t come up very often, maybe we’re not simply doing enough on it, maybe there’s more to be done on that subject.”</i>
Value in relationship	1	<i>“But yah I think that in general they are recognized as being an important organizations but I don’t feel like the back and forth is there, and maybe it should be.”</i>
Weighing story elements	5	<i>“I think it is really about balance, like let’s tell the story, tell the story that we need to and understand why we’re telling the story, but let’s also accept the fact that we have a responsibility.”</i>

Phase 3: Themes

Media culture

- Practical realities
- Value of independence
- Flexibility
- Guideline tone within this culture

Media learning

- Professional influences

- Media learning processes
- Communication of suicide reporting
- Guidelines within these influences and processes

Decision-making in reporting suicide

- Public interest
- Internal checks and balances
- Ethics in journalism
- The role of guidelines in decision-making

Changes in social landscape

- Shift in framing suicide
- Revisiting traditional rules around suicide reporting
- Reduction in media control of dialogue

Media responsibility

- Role of media in society
- Validity of research linking reporting to contagion