

“DEADLY WOMEN”:
EXAMINING (AUDIO)VISUAL (RE)PRESENTATIONS OF VIOLENT WOMEN
AND GIRLS IN INFOTAINMENT MEDIA

By: Isabel Scheuneman Scott
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Supervised by: Dr. Jennifer M. Kilty
University of Ottawa

Dedication

*To those who feel the confines of gender,
To those who do not recognize these restraints,
And to those who struggle to break free.*

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ABSTRACT

Women have historically been the subject of stereotypes – especially criminalized women as they are constructed in the mass media. These stereotypes become particularly problematic when they are invoked in infotainment media – a genre that combines information and entertainment and presents itself as primarily factual. As such, ideological messages delivered through infotainment are also (re)presented as truthful and may be more likely to be taken up by an unquestioning audience. This research aimed to answer the following research question: How does infotainment portray women who commit serious violent crime? In order to answer this question, a qualitative content analysis was employed and “*Deadly Women*”, a televised infotainment series that narrates and re-enacts true crime stories of women who kill, was selected as a case study. The sample consisted of previously identified typologies: mothers who kill their children, women who kill their partners, adolescent girls who kill, and vigilantes who kill their abusers. Stemming from a critical feminist framework, the analysis revealed that *Deadly Women* relies on two primary trajectories to explain the violence committed by women and girls. While both trajectories emphasized gendered stereotypes that involved emotionality and mental health issues, they were nonetheless distinct. The first trajectory evoked narratives of the ‘emotionless’ and ‘psychopathic’ perpetrator; while the second trajectory characterized the offender as overly ‘emotional’ and ‘depressed’. These trajectories, along with their related variables, problematically (re)presented violent women and girls in simplistic and dualistic manners that served to obscure rather than to clarify the circumstances surrounding their crimes.

INTRODUCTION

For as long as I can remember I have been interested in gender – not just the things that appear to relate to it on the surface, but also the things that are deeply rooted in its performance. For instance, why is there a different set of gendered behavioural expectations for boys and girls? While boys are not only expected but are often encouraged to ‘play rough’ – a belief encapsulated in the saying ‘boys will be boys’ – girls are expected to be gentle and ‘ladylike’. These cultural differences in how gender is perceived have long affected me. As I navigated through pivotal moments in my life, I sometimes crashed into gender barriers that I did not believe in, which taught me the consequences of acting ‘like a boy’ (e.g.: rough, assertive, competitive and later on, aggressive and sometimes even violent). Indeed, school authorities did not attribute my aggression in adolescence to the notion that ‘girls will be girls’ and few acknowledged the many challenges that some adolescents face; instead, I was treated like a ‘bad girl’ who was difficult to manage.

These gendered barriers that taught me how to behave ‘like a girl’ could never explain what was below the surface of my aggression – namely, my own experiences of victimization in childhood and adolescence. These experiences were, for the most part, invisible – however, they were made visible through my acts of aggression towards those bullies who hurt me. Interestingly, the explicit punishments for my aggressive acts often had less severe consequences than the implicit social punishments that accompanied them. Indeed, the attitudes held by many (e.g.: girls should not be aggressive) were apparent in the discrimination and exclusion that I found myself in the midst of. At this vulnerable time of my life, I felt like there was no way out – I was bound in a gendered confinement from which I could not escape. Of course, it is too simple

to solely attribute my acts of aggression to my experiences of trauma; however, it is a piece of the larger puzzle.

My experiences are not unique amongst women and girls – especially *criminalized* women and girls. Indeed, there are many documented negative life experiences that criminalized women and girls often face such as low self-esteem, depression, self-injury, substance abuse, and so on (Donohue & Moore, 2009; Hannah-Moffat, 2000; Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2006). It was the collective gendered experiences of women and girls that kept my interest as I grew up and as I traversed the world of academia. I began asking questions: Why were boys expected to be aggressive while girls' aggression was either demonized (as in my case) or swept under the rug (in the cases of the majority of those who bullied me)? On the other hand, why were some girls punished more severely for the same acts that boys committed without receiving much more than a slap on the wrist? While my mother taught me her feminist views, her generation was more concerned with struggles surrounding social and cultural equality between women and men (including gender role expectations that flow from one's position as wife and mother), differentiating between sex and gender, sexuality (including health and reproduction rights), and employment; whereas, I, like others of my generation, became concerned with reclaiming gendered words (such as "bitch" and "slut") as well as femininity (e.g.: the notion that women who wear dresses and heels can also be intelligent), diversity (e.g.: race, class, age, sexual orientation), and deconstructing categorical thinking (e.g.: gender stereotypes) (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). These concerns led to asking more questions, both outside and inside of academia.

While my undergraduate university, Kwantlen in British Columbia, had plenty of critical theorists in the criminology department, I also undertook a minor in psychology. My studies in

the psychology department enabled me to learn about things such as risk assessments and psychopathy. While these methods of interpretation once held greater value for me in terms of understanding and explaining women's criminality, when I began graduate level studies at the University of Ottawa I was encouraged to think more critically: Why are the psy sciences considered one of the best methods to understand criminality? Why are risk assessments used on women when they were developed for men? How are correctional interpretations of the notions of 'risk' and 'need' affecting criminalized women? What are the implications of embracing psy explanations on our understanding of women's criminality? By asking more critical questions I began to see the problems inherent in some of what I had previously studied. I took an interest in both feminist and cultural criminology to further my understanding of media and the feedback loop that was now apparent to me between truth, science, categorizations, stereotypes, and media – specifically in relation to gender. I wanted to understand what 'truth' was – specifically, how are truths (re)produced? What is considered a truth and who is responsible for disseminating it?

In the first year of my graduate studies I learned of the term 'infotainment' after reading Steven Kohm's (2009) article entitled *Naming, shaming and criminal justice: Mass-mediated humiliation as entertainment and punishment*. It diverted my attention from wanting to directly measure public perspectives of women who commit violence toward wanting to study and interpret media (re)presentations. Indeed, Kohm's (2009) article helped me to realize that many of the questions I began asking could be answered through an analysis of media – specifically infotainment, which then led me to select *Deadly Women* (an infotainment series that documents and re-enacts true crime stories of women who kill) for a case study. As such, my thesis began to take shape as I became 're-educated' in critical criminology.

This thesis sets out to answer and explore some of the questions that I formulated upon my arrival in Ottawa. In particular, this thesis aims to answer: “How does infotainment portray women who commit serious violent crime?” This thesis is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, I explore the topical literature that lays the foundation for the rest of the thesis by exploring the sociopolitical climate that creates and sustains stereotypes about women’s violence and criminalized women more broadly. I also describe the various groups (e.g.: typologies) of women who kill that make up my sample – mothers who kill their children, wives who kill their intimate partners for financial and material gain, girls who kill, and victims/vigilantes – as they are presented in the extant literature.

The second chapter lays out the epistemological and ontological stance that underpins this research. This chapter is subdivided into several sections. First, I explain the umbrella term ‘critical criminology’ (encompassing feminist as well as cultural criminology). Next, I examine connections between knowledge, truth, and power in media before looking at how facts are visually constructed partially by the use of (audio)visual conventions. Finally, I detail some of the implications of scientific categorization on the criminalization of women.

In the third chapter, I explore the multidisciplinary methodological approach I employed for this research. This includes introducing the theoretical importance of the concept of ‘infotainment’, discussing my research objectives, questions, and design, describing the methods of coding and data analysis, and, finally, identifying evaluative measures of rigour in terms of qualitative research standards.

In the fourth chapter, I discuss the relevant and prominent findings of this research while connecting them to both the topical and theoretical literature in order to offer insight into my research questions. Prevalent trends such as dual constructions and the two explanatory

trajectories that *Deadly Women* uses to explain women and girls' pathways to violence (emotional and emotionless) are also explored.

Finally, the conclusion expands on the analysis by discussing some of the broader theoretical implications of my findings. I do so by drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1989), specifically his concept of 'theory effect' in order to explain the relationships between media, truth, science, categorizations, and stereotypes. Some of the limitations inherent in this research are also identified. I conclude by offering suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Most Canadians are never touched by crime, yet there is increasing fear of violence that can be partially attributed to the saturation of violent crime in media coverage (Lee, 2007; Mallea, 2010). In fact, in 2008, the Canadian crime rate was lower than it had been in the previous 25 years (Mallea, 2010). Garland (2000) argues that individuals can never experience crime in an “unmediated, untutored, unscripted way”; but rather that we are historically situated in a collective cultural experience that affects the meanings individuals attribute to encounters with crime (p. 355). There is no doubt that media are important in shaping popular knowledge about crime, which often results in misinformation and even mythology (Garland, 2000; Kohm, 2009). For instance, criminalized women are often the subject of stereotypes¹, and violent women arguably even more so. Ironically, even though cases involving women who commit violent crimes are typically at the forefront of media coverage, explanations of women and girls²’ criminality are often lacking within criminological theories of crime and in research more generally (Daly, 2010).

Taking a closer look at how criminalized women are constructed and characterized in state and media discourse is important because “the way that we, as a society, talk about women and their use of violence and force has grave implications for social policy and women’s experiences in the criminal justice system” (Gilbert, 2002, p. 1271). In order to unpack the literature on women who commit serious violent crime, this chapter is divided into three parts. In the first section, I provide context through a discussion of contemporary socio-political

¹ A stereotype is a preconceived, oversimplified, and often prejudicial stock image of the characteristics which typify a person, race, sexuality, or community that are generally resistant to change and may lead to treating them in a particular – often derogatory – way (Last, 2007; McArthur, 2013; Scott & Marshall, 2012).

² By ‘girls’, I mean females under the age of 18.

developments as reflected within state discourse on criminalized populations. Next, I explore literature pertaining to gender, crime, and media. Finally, I illustrate several prevalent yet problematic typologies and accompanying stereotypes in media constructions of women who kill.

PART ONE

CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S IMPRISONMENT

Like any social problem it is important to understand the particular socio-political context in which it occurs. Therefore, I begin by sketching out the rise of biology, psychology, and the 'psy-sciences' within state, carceral, and criminological discourses. Kendall (2000) explains the growing influence and importance of the 'psy-sciences' in the correctional environment:

The psychological sciences are a powerful tool enabling correctional workers to negotiate, uphold and obscure the paradoxes and dominant power relations within the prison. By the psychological sciences (psy-sciences), I mean psychology, psychiatry and the other disciplines which designate themselves with the prefix 'psy'... The psy-sciences promise solutions to a variety of social problems [and]... it is believed that these answers and the work informing them are objective and neutral. As such, the psy-sciences are conferred high status and given legitimacy. Finally, they are consistent with the individualism underlying the philosophy of liberal democracy in Western nations (p. 83).

Indeed, it was this desire to predict behaviour that led to the development of risk assessment tools that are believed to allow for increasingly precise divisions of populations based on the notion of their aggregated 'risk' potential (Hannah-Moffat, 2000; Kendall, 2000; Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2006). As norms for particular criminalized populations were constructed, the further one was perceived from the norm, the more one was seen as a risky and deviant 'Other' – a perception used to legitimize state control of the individual (Kendall, 2000). Kendall (2000) argues that "by debasing people's differences or 'otherness', social problems are regarded

as individual failures and weaknesses” (p. 84) rather than resulting from the intersection of multiple oppressions and the socio-political and historical context.

Although risk assessment tools were originally designed for male offenders, they are continually applied to female offenders. Risk is generally interpreted as a security concern (e.g.: potential threat of danger and the prevention of harm to others) and is considered in relation to a series of needs (e.g.: resources and programs). There is often a conflation of these terms when it comes to women, where needs are understood to be risks (Hannah-Moffat, 2000; Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2006). Under the risk/need model, the ‘neediest’ female offenders (i.e.: those most affected by multiple and intersecting oppressions) are seen as the most likely to recidivate and are thus subject to higher security level classifications and lengthier correctional interventions. Some of the key risks/needs identified for criminalized women include: low self-esteem, poor educational and vocational achievement, parental death at an early age, foster care placement, living on the streets, prostitution, suicide attempts, self-injury, substance abuse, parental responsibilities, and dependency (Donohue & Moore, 2009; Hannah-Moffat, 2000; Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2006). It is important to note that many of these factors are static in nature and are thus unchanging and unchangeable, which means that correctional interventions cannot actually alter the woman’s perceived risk level.

In this regard, risks are managed by interventions and treatments aimed at the individual rather than the structural level (Hannah-Moffat, 2000; Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2005; Pollack, 2006). Many recent attempts to address women’s needs are focused on mental health, specifically cognitive behavioural therapy and the prescription of psychotropic medications – resulting in the pathologization of incarcerated women (Kendall, 2000; Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2005). Many criminalized women are deemed high-need as a result of their distress and anger

upon entering the carceral system – subsequently they are characterized as either ‘difficult to manage’ or ‘mad’ due to their ‘depression’ and ‘anxiety’ which seemingly justifies individualized treatment under the psy-medical model (Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2006). Those women with the most risks/needs are believed to be in the greatest need of (therapeutic) interventions that aim to ‘fix’ mental health issues; furthermore, those who deny therapeutic treatments are seen as riskier than those who do not refuse treatment (Hannah-Moffat, 2000; Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2006). In fact, imprisoned women often have “medication *orders*” that they are expected to follow should they wish to be released (Kilty, 2012, p. 163). Under the medical model, where ‘badness’ is perceived as the result of sickness, medication functions as an agent of social control that attempts to ‘normalize’ and master illness – commonly referred to as the medicalization of deviance (Kilty, 2012).

The empowerment model³ essentially reframes the social marginalization of women as an individual psychological problem (Pollack, 2006) and demonstrates the effects of Donohue and Moore’s (2009) distinction between the client and the offender. The *client* is an offender who consumes social services mandated through the criminal justice system and actively participates in their own punishment and correction by learning to make prosocial choices and participating in available interventions within the carceral system (Donohue & Moore, 2009; O’Malley, 1999). On the other hand, the *offender* is regarded as hopeless and is dealt with in a more traditional and retributive manner. Offenders are seen as deserving of punishment and subordination, whereas clients are seen as worthy of help and empowerment. High-risk offenders

³ The state uses the term ‘empowerment’ to mean appropriate self-governance and taking sole responsibility for one’s (criminal) actions (while excluding any social and structural influences) – which effectively responsabilizes criminalized women for their rehabilitation, criminal history, and the management of their risks and needs (Donohue & Moore, 2009; Hannah-Moffat, 2000; O’Malley, 1999; Pollack, 2006).

in particular are perceived as those who should be “locked up, not worked on and certainly not worked with” (Donohue & Moore, 2009, p. 321). Thus, it is strategic for criminalized women to (re)present themselves as ‘sad’ or ‘mad’ (e.g.: in ‘need’ of services to ‘fix’ themselves) rather than ‘bad’ (e.g.: not treatable). It is important to note that if clients were not perceived as treatable, there would be no need for the creation of interventions to treat them and thus rid the accompanying criminality (Donohue & Moore, 2009).

One major problem with the empowerment approach is that it focuses on the offender as solely responsible for their actions (Donohue & Moore, 2009; Hannah-Moffat, 2000; Pollack, 2006). This is problematic as psy discourses and practices are increasingly being taken up by lay persons and experts alike in order to explain criminal behaviour at the expense of alternative explanations (Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2006). Indeed, Kendall (2000) argues that the work of psy-experts and researchers is worrying not only because “it pathologizes women prisoners, but also because it dehumanizes them and obscures its own complicity through claims of scientific authority and neutrality” (Kendall, 2000, p. 92). Kilty (2012) supports this argument by stating that mental illness diagnoses “depoliticize and fail to adequately account for the socio-political, cultural, and thus structural basis for the distress women experience” (p. 165). Indeed, one should not deny the emotional distress that female prisoners often experience, but rather one must “emphasize that how this distress is defined and understood is not the result of a scientific discovery of the ‘truth’. It is instead a social and political process. The psy-sciences have served an important role in this process” (Kendall, 2000, p. 92).

The almost exclusive use of psy expertise from forensic psy professionals to deal with particular sets of pathologies underscores the assumption that “not only do the pathologies suffered by the client ensure that individuals are the cause of their own criminality, but these

pathologies also verify that the justice system is the right and indeed the only institution able to offer people curative interventions” (Donohue & Moore, 2009, p. 323). Furthermore, Donohue and Moore (2009) argue that:

reframing offenders as clients creates the confused sense that they are somehow ‘stakeholders’ in a system that is, in all reality, simply designed to bind them to the stakes, not present them with their own. The notion that people in conflict with the law have choice or empowerment or agency afforded to them by the State is perhaps one of the greatest (if not most effective) mythologies of contemporary punishment (p. 329).

Indeed, gendered and racialized discourses of dependency, responsibility, and accountability are rampant within the carceral and welfare systems – functioning to construct “criminally dependent” women (Pollack, 2006, p. 242). These discourses and “strategies of neo-liberal governance signify a retreat from notions of social responsibility and a change to personal/individual blame and self-regulation” (Pollack, 2006, p. 243) that have a disproportionately negative effect on those who experience the most social exclusion by treating problems caused by socio-political, historical, and economic conditions as individual failures (Donohue & Moore, 2009; Pollack, 2006). The reframing of social problems from societal to individual pathologies ultimately creates a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the very institutions that create social problems also create and benefit from their ‘treatment’; and when women ‘fail’ (e.g.: recidivate), it is constructed as an individual failure rather than a systemic failure.

PART TWO

GENDER AND CRIME IN MEDIA

Having briefly examined the socio-political context structuring contemporary correctional explanations of women’s criminality, I now move on to examine how media (re)present criminalized women. One glaring problem inherent in the media’s portrayal of women who commit serious violent crime is that media have a predetermined threshold for what

it considers newsworthy (what television, film and news producers believe will attract an audience) – which then determines what stories are reported (Jewkes, 2004). Generally, the more newsworthy criteria a story has, the more likely it is to be broadcast; as such, the concept of newsworthiness is useful for understanding why certain stories are selected for broadcast over others. Crime news newsworthiness is characterized by 12 criteria⁴ laid out by Jewkes (2004). Although all of the criteria are relevant, for the purpose of this research, I will briefly explain the *most* relevant.

The first criterion is *simplification* – where the story is reduced to a minimal number of parts or themes. Simplification entails creating binary oppositions such as good versus evil. News reporting is brief in order to avoid “strain[ing] the attention span of the audience” and to restrict the number of possible meanings that are inherent in a story (Jewkes, 2004, p. 43). News reporters actively invite the audience to reach a consensual conclusion about a story rather than creating several possible meanings – thus viewers receive the media’s preferred interpretation. Indeed, Jewkes (2004) states: “not only does news reporting privilege brevity, clarity and unambiguity in its presentation, but it encourages the reader, viewer and listener to suspend their skills of critical interpretation and respond in unanimous accord” (p. 44). Simplicity also includes the increased use of heuristics and stereotypes.

The second criterion is *individualism* – definitions of crime, rationalizations of responses to crime, and criminal behaviours are attributed to the belief that individuals are responsible for their actions regardless of the surrounding context. Both offenders and victims are responsabilized; however, offenders are often pathologized, whereas victims are not (Jewkes,

⁴ The 12 criteria for newsworthiness discussed by Jewkes (2004) are: threshold, predictability, simplification, individualism, risk, sex, celebrity or high-status persons, proximity, violence or conflict, visual spectacle or graphic imagery, children, and conservative ideology and political diversion.

2004). Accompanying individualism is the obsession with risk (e.g.: risk assessments, risk management, and risk avoidance).

Sex, the third criterion relevant to this study, includes sexual violence, ‘stranger-danger’, and female offenders portrayed as sexual predators (even if their crimes have no sexual element). Sex is often specific to women and involves the highly sexualized, eroticized, and even pornographic (re)presentations of women (e.g.: young females, female victims, and female offenders) in media. Sex is considered the most salient of the newsworthy values and is often paired with violence (Jewkes, 2004).

The fourth criterion, *violence*, is similar to sex as it fuels media’s desire for drama. Violence is argued to be the most common criteria of all media and is often reported in a routine and mundane manner that lacks in-depth analysis and ultimately fosters the idea that violent crime is more prevalent than it actually is (Jewkes, 2004). In this way, violence has become increasingly commodified – it is widely distributed across various media genres and is pleurably consumed by many people around the world (Jarvis, 2007; Jewkes, 2004, p. 54; Kohm, 2009).

Spectacle and graphic imagery is the fifth criterion (Jewkes, 2004) – pictures, which frequently demonstrate ‘truth’ of a story, are used to verify the particular angle that broadcasters wish to promote. Graphic images of violence are the most likely to receive extensive media coverage. Emotive language frequently accompanies images that further serve to identify the ‘enemy’ (e.g.: violent perpetrators). Jewkes (2004) argues that “the ‘spectacle’ of news reporting has arguably blurred the lines between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ and made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’” in an age of ‘fake TV’ that drives towards infotainment (p. 55).

The last criterion Jewkes (2004) describes is what connects all of the criteria – a reliance on right-wing consensus that promotes *conservative ideology and political diversion* hence justifying the ‘way of life’. Jewkes (2004) states that “despite claiming to be the voice of the people, the criminalization of certain individuals and activities by these newspapers highlights the general perceived intolerance towards anyone of anything that transgresses an essentially conservative agenda” (p. 59). This process effectively deflects attention from other serious social issues – particularly those that are the state’s responsibility such as poverty, patriarchy, and a failing education system.

The adherence to and reliance on a broadly right-wing consensus renders visible the symbiotic relationship between the mass media and politics that leads to a “populist punitiveness” in which calls are made for harsher sentencing for those who are guilty of traversing the conservative agenda (Jewkes, 2004, p. 58-59). Women who kill frequently illustrate most or all of the 12 criteria for newsworthiness as illustrated in Jewkes (2004) statement:

... their histories and motives are reduced to the *simplest* of forms (that is, that they must be ‘mad’ or ‘bad’); their pathology is constructed as *individual* and random;... their crimes are explained by reference to their *sexuality* or sexual deviance;... some gain iconic status through *graphic imagery*;... and even when children are not directly involved, the anomaly of women who kill being *potential* mothers is taken as proof enough of their deviation of notions of traditional womanhood, notions that are at the heart of *conservative ideology* (p. 134).

Media is selective not only of the types of crimes that are reported, but also of the criminals and circumstances under which they are reported (Wilson et al., 2010). For instance, the most commonly reported crimes in media, such as serial killing, are those that happen with the least frequency but because of their high appearance rate in media, they appear more common than they actually are (Kohm, 2009, p. 194; Wilson et al., 2010). Furthermore, media

portrayals of infrequent, but newsworthy, crimes (such as female perpetrated homicide) play a role in determining the (artificial) boundary between normal and abnormal (Skilbrei, 2012). This is especially true for gender norms. For instance, in the United Kingdom, a triple homicide case where two males and two females were charged with the murders made news headlines. However, the media coverage was disproportionately awarded to the female defendants (Skilbrei, 2012).

Indeed, Kilty (2010) argues that female perpetrated violence shatters the very gender stereotypes⁵ that media (re)construct and maintain. The media use common gender stereotypes as a convenient shorthand to label certain behaviours, traits, occupations, and physical appearances as appropriate to one sex (but not the other) and which also inform the socialization of sex roles (Kent, 2007; Scott & Marshall, 2012; Vanderberg, Brennan, & Chesney-Lind, 2013). Gender stereotypes hold such tremendous cultural power that by the time children are two years of age, they already perceive gendered associations with behaviours, traits, and occupations; by the time children are six years of age, they are well aware of their own and others' genders and they engage in stereotypical gendered activities (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008).

One way that gender stereotypes become apparent is in the different societal expectations of behaviours that are appropriate for each gender. For instance, Kilty (2010) argues that:

the frequently used phrase 'boys will be boys' reflects our cultural acceptance of a kind of masculinity that may unproblematically include violence, where boys may engage in deviant activities and where these things are simplistically 'normalized' as part of growing up male. In contrast, the dominant social construction of girls suggests that they do not graffiti fences or get into schoolyard brawls. Nor do girls act out

⁵ Gender stereotypes are cultural representations of men and women resulting from socialization processes that shape (and polarize) personal beliefs about gender differences (Chandler & Munday, 2011).

violently; in fact, girls are not, should not and *cannot* be violent (p. 159).

Indeed, it is the social, racial, classist, situational, and generational factors that work together to influence the production of femininity and masculinity (Kilty, 2010). Without taking these contextual factors into account, media problematically explain crime using stereotypes that typically uphold neoliberal and neoconservative law and order ideologies that contribute to the ‘Othering’ of offenders as well as to public acceptance of (and demand for) punitive correctional policies (Barron, 2011; Kohm, 2009; O’Malley, 1999; Rapping, 2003; Rowe, 2012).

Gender stereotypes are also apparent in the media’s differential (re)presentations of boy and girl violence (Kilty, 2010). Indeed, the shock associated with male perpetrated violence is somewhat minimized in that it is considered a typical and normal aspect of masculinity (especially when committed against women); whereas female perpetrated violence is sensationalized because it is seen as atypical and abnormal. For example, in the case of 14-year-old Reena Virk from British Columbia (Canada), two teens were convicted of her murder – one female (Kelly Ellard) and one male (Warren Glowatski). Kilty (2010) argues that gender roles affected both public perception and media (re)presentations of the pair such that Ellard was depicted as simultaneously beautiful, dangerous, and ‘monstrous’, while Glowatski was feminized and his role in the murder was minimized. Kilty’s (2010) research demonstrates how media sensationalizes women who commit violence by emphasizing their failure to uphold hegemonic gender norms. Hegemonic femininity is considered by Schippers (2007) as practices and characteristics that situate femininity as dialectically related but inferior to masculinity. As such, hegemonic femininity serves the interests of the ruling class (e.g.: men) and involves a hierarchal relationship both between and within the sex/gender binaries such that masculine traits are valued over feminine traits and certain femininities (similar to masculinities) are subordinate

to others. For example, 'deviant'/subordinated femininities, such as those expressed via same-sex and sexually 'promiscuous' behaviours, disrupt and threaten patriarchal notions of gender; as a result, they are stigmatized (Schippers, 2007). Notions of femininity and masculinity thus play a key role in how stereotypes of violent women are constructed and (re)produced in media.

The media's frequent use of gendered stereotypes to make sense of and narrate crime affects not only how violent women are characterized, but also how 'normal' (i.e.: non-criminal) women are characterized (Faith, 1993b; Jewkes, 2004) since media shape our beliefs about what women should and should not do and how women should and should not behave. Much of the feminist and (audio)visual literature examining gender shows consensus regarding the common stereotypes about women. One common construction of the ideal woman centres on how she looks. The 'ideal woman' is thin (but not *too* thin), attractive, well dressed, and glamorous, has blue eyes and blonde hair, and transmits a 'sensual message' that displays her sexual charms and curves (Ajzenstadt & Steinberg, 1997).

Another common characterization of the ideal woman revolves around her ability to bear and care for children and thus to be a 'good mother' who is gentle, nurturing, and compassionate (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2010; Kilty & Dej, 2012; Faith, 1987; Menzies & Chunn, 2006; Shantz, Kilty, & Frigon, 2009). The ideal mother also assumes a high degree of emotionality, itself a negative character trait that constitutes women as irrational and unable to control their emotions. This gendered stereotype is typically linked to portrayals of women who have committed violence and are perceived as full of revenge and as uncontrollably jealous (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2010; Comack, 2006; Faith, 1987, 1993; Jewkes, 2004). Ironically, at the same time that women are seen as negatively affected by their emotionality, their essential nature is constructed as passive, docile, obedient, dependent, and subservient (Ajzenstadt &

Steinberg, 1997; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2010; Comack, 2006; Faith, 1993b; Jewkes, 2004; Menzies & Chunn, 2006) – adjectives that seemingly do not fit with the image of a highly emotional woman. This contradiction seems to position criminalized women as simultaneously dangerous and in danger (Kilty & Frigon 2006). There is much irony in suggesting that while women are the primary caregivers of children, they are simultaneously unskilled and inherently dependent, helpless, and childish (Ajzenstadt & Steinberg, 1997; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2010; Comack, 2006; Jewkes, 2004). This suggests that while women are assumed to have the ability to be a ‘good mother’, they are not worthy to teach their children skills nor are they able to financially and emotionally support their children on their own.

Interestingly, Ajzenstadt and Steinberg (1997) argue that criminalized women are feminized in media due to the focus on traditional gender roles that emphasize familial status, age, physical appearance, sexuality, and social role (e.g.: wives and mothers). Ajzenstadt and Steinberg (1997) argue that:

the numerous stereotypical descriptions and comments relating to the physical appearance of the female offender, her behavior, her performance as mother, wife and housewife, and her dependency on male accomplices minimize her role as a criminal; her act is portrayed as... infantile, being prevailed upon by males to commit a crime, and usually as playing only a minor role. In these descriptions, the woman is constructed as exercising limited control over her life. In this way the reporters contributed to the feminization of the female offender. They located her within the social framework outlined for women – a framework which follows the stereotypical sexual, social and moral conduct accepted for her gender (p. 71).

Although this argument seems relatively justified given the above premises, many scholars do not agree that media unilaterally feminizes female offenders; arguing to the contrary, that media masculinizes female offenders – especially those who commit violence (Comack, 2006; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Faith, 1987; Faith, 1993; Kilty, 2010). Indeed, these scholars see the hegemonic characterization of the ideal woman as sharply contrasting with assumptions

about the criminalized woman. For instance, while the ideal woman displays normative ‘feminine’ traits (such as being nice, innocent, nurturing, caring, and relationship-oriented), the criminalized woman is ultimately seen as ‘masculinized’ since she is portrayed as butch, monstrous, manipulative, inherently evil, and the antithesis of the feminine women due to her lack of ‘maternal instinct’ and ‘ladylike qualities’ (Comack, 2006; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Faith, 1987; Kilty 2010). Some of the so-called masculine traits that criminalized women are thought to possess revolve around sexuality (i.e.: they are portrayed as hypersexual, sexually aggressive, and sexual predators – even when their crimes are not sexual in nature), lack of emotional display, as well as being ‘overly’ assertive, independent, aggressive, violent, and dangerous (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2010; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013; Jewkes, 2004). Additionally, criminalized women are often described in terms of their particularly weak emotional character compared to that of ‘normal’ women – constructing criminalized women as unstable, depressed, vengeful, irritable, irrational, and ‘mad’ (Comack, 2006; Lloyd, 1995; Miller & White, 2004). Typically, criminalized women’s moral character also comes under scrutiny as they are commonly seen as untrustworthy, manipulative, and deceitful (Comack, 2006; Kilty & Frigon, 2006; Miller & White, 2004).

PART THREE

THE ‘OTHERS’: GENDERED STEREOTYPES OF CRIMINALIZED WOMEN AND GIRLS

A) Mothers

There is not much that defines a woman’s role more than being a mother (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2011) and thus there is hardly another crime that directly confronts social expectations quite like infanticide (Wilczynski, 1991). Naylor (2001) argues that mothers who are violent towards their child(ren) challenge society’s understandings of what it means to be a mother and

that both law and media have created a range of (stereotypical) explanations of infanticide. These explanations are accomplished by using “closely entwined sets of discourses about violent mothers. ‘The law’ begins to construct and explain the violent mother through police and medical reports/texts..., [whereas] media reports draw heavily on police and legal texts as ‘authorised knowers’” (Naylor, 2001, p. 155-156). As such, law and media advance a particular reality by constructing stories that draw on and (re)create commonly understood narratives, even when these familiar scripts do not ‘fit’ the circumstances of the case (Naylor, 2001).

Most often, criminalized mothers are dichotomized into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers – functioning to control the boundaries of femininity, especially in cases where a mother kills her child(ren) (Naylor, 2001; Wilczynski, 1991). A *good mother* is caring, selfless, and warm while she ‘naturally’ loves and protects her children (Naylor, 2001; Wilczynski, 1991). Good mothers are expected to have great tolerance for various life stresses, such as crying babies, and to express maternal instincts while repressing sexual instincts – things that are not expected of fathers (Naylor, 2001). Good mothers are generally constructed as middle or upper class and as possessing the virtues of fidelity, chastity, and modesty (Rapaport, 2006). On the other hand, ‘bad mothers’ are portrayed as ‘monsters’ who do not possess ‘good mother’ traits (Naylor, 2001, p. 171). *Bad mothers* are perceived as nonconforming to gender stereotypes because they are seen as wicked, ruthless, selfish, cold, callous, neglectful of their children and domestic responsibilities, violent, promiscuous, evil, masculine, unfeminine, and solely responsible for their crimes – thus justifying their harsh treatment within the criminal justice system (Huckerby, 2003; Meyer & Weisbart, 2012; Wilczynski, 1991).

In addition to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers, there are *mad mothers* who are “characterized as ‘good mothers’ who *have* conformed to traditional gender roles and whose crimes seem to be the

result of mental illness” (Meyer & Weisbart, 2012, p. 150, emphasis added). Ironically, perceptions that mothers who kill their children suffer from psychiatric, emotional, personality, or mental health problems can meet the requirement for diminished responsibility in infanticide cases (Wilczynski, 1991). Indeed, infanticide is often considered a symptom of a mental illness (e.g.: depression), which offers a stereotypical, yet convincing, explanation of an ‘inexplicable act’ (Wilczynski, 1991). Rapaport (2006) argues that the ‘mad mother’ is the preferred explanation of infanticide because “it is more soothing to the anxiety about female compliance with mothering norms to see infanticide as the product of disease, [or] biological failure, [rather] than moral failure” (p. 554).

Similar to but less common than the mad mother is the *sad mother* who is seen as a victim of circumstance (and/or biology) and as lacking agency and rational decision-making skills when she is faced with difficult circumstances (Menzies & Chunn, 2006; Meyer & Weisbart, 2012; Naylor, 2001). Sad mothers are often thought to suffer from particular circumstances or ‘personal inadequacies’ such as having a low IQ (Naylor, 2001). Legal and media characterizations of mad and sad mothers sometimes overlap in their construction of female perpetrated infanticide which results in the perception that “women who are victims of biology gone awry, and of women and girls who, due to immaturity or adverse circumstances, are not able to accept the maternal role” (Rapaport, 2006, p. 528).

Interestingly, according to Wilczynski (1991), the perception of an infanticidal woman as a good, bad, or mad/sad mother can change depending on where she lays on the pathological continuum of female offending. For instance, a woman can initially be perceived as a ‘bad mother’ but then receive sympathetic treatment upon the arrival of evidence pointing towards a ‘mad mother’. This shift from bad to mad can occur when a woman conforms to ‘proper’ notions

of femininity such as outwardly expressing remorse after a period of time in which she did not outwardly express remorse and/or through a lifestyle change such as initially behaving ‘promiscuously’ but then settling down into a serious relationship with a well-to-do male partner (Wilczynski, 1991).

It is within a ‘mother-blaming’ culture, in which a woman’s primary role in life is to raise obedient and conforming children, that mothers who struggle with parenthood feel as though their maternal instincts have failed (Huckerby, 2003; Meyer & Weisbart, 2012; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2011). Because mothers are seen as responsible for their children’s behaviour, they “live under the glare of public judgment, and understandably, they may internalize society’s verdict as their own” leading them to not seek help and/or deny that they need help (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2011, p. 78) – despite the fact that their real and perceived lack of social support is one of the main factors associated with mothers killing their child(ren) (Huckerby, 2003; Meyer & Weisbart, 2012). Mothers who kill their children produce strong yet polarized reactions ranging from sympathy, to disgust, to horror that are often the basis of opinions about the women involved and what should happen to them (Meyer & Weisbart, 2012).

These mad/bad/sad categorizations influence the outcome of female perpetrated infanticide cases as the prosecution and defence often employ them to build their legal narratives (Huckerby, 2003; Meyer & Weisbart, 2012; Rapaport, 2006; Wilczynski, 1991). For instance, when a mother is perceived to be affected by hormones (i.e.: a ‘mad mother’) or unfortunate circumstances (i.e.: a ‘sad mother’) she is more likely to receive a ‘lenient’ sentence in the form of a hospital order or probation; whereas a mother who is perceived to be evil (i.e.: a ‘bad mother’) is more likely to receive a harsher carceral sentence (Huckerby, 2003; Wilczynski, 1991). These popular explanations of mothers who kill their child(ren) repress the material

experiences of these women and their child(ren) by reinforcing familiar myths about motherhood.

Indeed, by dichotomizing criminalized women into ‘mad’ and ‘bad’ (and sometimes ‘sad’) categories, “we marginalize and distort their experience and knowledge of what has actually happened. The crime is refracted through a number of mirrors (for example psychiatry, the legal system and the media), which often serve to obscure rather than explain the act of child-killing” (Wilczynski, 1991, p. 84). These categorizations of women as ‘mad’ or ‘bad’ “remain safely rooted at an individual level, hormones, madness and evil, and there is no need to look beyond this to wider social and economic problems” (Wilczynski, 1991, p. 84).

The most newsworthy cases (i.e.: bizarre and statistically insignificant) are the ones that nurture mediated myths and misconceptions about infanticide and mothers who kill (Rapaport, 2006). One such myth that is created by focusing on selected notorious cases, such as the Andrea Yates⁶ case, is that fathers are not seen as playing a role in infanticide cases, despite the fact that more men kill children than women. Indeed, mothers are only more responsible than fathers in the deaths of children younger than one week old (Rapaport, 2006). Another myth is that severe mental illness is the primary reason that women commit infanticide. Although mental illnesses such as depression are common amongst those who commit infanticide, most infanticides occur within the context of abuse (or neglect) within the family/home where the offender does not actually intend to kill the child(ren) (Rapaport, 2006). Indeed, the majority of child homicides are caused by (ongoing) child abuse at the hands of parents and other household intimates who do *not* suffer from severe mental illness (Rapaport, 2006; Wilczynski, 1991).

⁶ Suffering from severe postpartum depression, Andrea Yates drowned her five children in a bathtub. Yates was found not guilty by reason of insanity and was committed to a high-security mental health facility where she received medical treatment.

In this context, female perpetrated infanticide cases appear to be more about the regulation of women (and the abiding anxieties about female sexuality and motherhood) than about the protection of children (Rapaport, 2006; Wilczynski, 1991). Indeed, Meyer and Weisbart (2012) argue that “when our attention is focused on the issue of mothers who kill their children, there is little exploration into understanding why such an act occurred and much more discussion about what the consequences of her actions should be” (p. 154).

B) Serial Profit Killers (The Black Widow)

Perhaps one of the most famous typologies of violent women is the black widow killer – named after a venomous spider that bites and kills its victims, typically male black widow spiders post-coitus (Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006). In terms of a criminal typology, the black widow “is a woman who systematically murders a single or multiple spouses, partners, other family members, or individuals outside of the family with whom she has developed a personal and usually intimate relationship” (Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006, p. 83). Indeed, the most common victims of a black widow are her husbands and/or intimates – whom she is said to actively seduce and manipulate (Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). As such, profit killers are known for rendering their victims ‘helpless’ enough to take control of their financial assets (Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006; Miller, 2014; Vronsky, 2007), which they accomplish, in part, by pathologically lying and adapting their personalities as necessary (Flowers & Flowers, 2001; Miller, 2014). Profit killers are often considered quite intelligent since they are perceived as “highly mobile and skilled at changing their identities to lure unsuspecting victims in diverse locations over time” – as they often change geographic locations after the murder of each victim in order to acquire new victims and to avoid suspicion (Miller, 2014, p. 7).

The motive behind the black widow's manipulation is primarily financial through the collection of life insurance policies, employment benefits, and other financial assets of her victims; however, secondary motives such as rage, revenge, control, and attention-seeking may also be present (Holmes & Holmes, 2001; Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006; Miller, 2014; Vronsky, 2007). Ironically, even though black widows' secondary motives may be emotion-related, these women are said to be absent of emotions such as empathy, caring, remorse, and sympathy (Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006). Thus, black widows are simultaneously narrated as emotionally out of control and emotionless.

Black widows generally kill after the age of 25 and may continue killing for a period of 10 years or more (or until they get caught) (Flowers & Flowers, 2001; Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006; Miller, 2014). Unlike their typical portrayal in movies such as *Basic Instinct* (1992), black widows are often plain in appearance, which adds to the intrigue when trying to understand how such a woman could lure a man to his death (Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006). A woman characterized as a black widow uses her sexuality and femininity to gain the confidence and trust of those she ultimately murders (Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). Ironically, this trusting relationship can act as an alibi to the murder (Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006).

Poison is the most common weapon of choice for profit killers, which she may continue to use as she tends to the victim personally, doting on him/her and responding to his/her every need (Holmes & Holmes, 2001). Interestingly, some poisons may resemble symptoms of diagnosable illnesses, such as heart failure, and are often undetectable by authorities that are unlikely to perform an autopsy if they believe that the victim died of natural causes (Flowers & Flowers, 2001; Holmes & Holmes, 2001; Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006; Miller, 2014). Black widows' choice of poison is deliberate; indeed, this relates back to their intelligence, which is

also demonstrated by the fact that many of these women work in the medical profession (Flowers & Flowers, 2001). This level of organization and careful planning often goes undetected for many years, thus allowing profit killers to commit additional crimes such as fraud and forgery (Flowers & Flowers, 2001; Holmes & Holmes, 2001).

C) Youth

Like violent crime more generally, with the rise of media coverage on ‘girl violence’ it appears as though girls are committing more crimes; and even with the lack of credible evidence to support this claim, a moral panic about girl violence has erupted (Barron, 2011; Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Kilty, 2010; Rapping, 2003). This was particularly the case in Canada during the 1990s for several reasons: the age of young offenders was raised from 16 to 18 years which increased the total population of this group (Artz, Stoneman, & Reitsma-Street, 2012); changes in policing, charging, and arrest patterns due to ‘zero tolerance’ policies, particularly in schools, that decreased the threshold for what constituted violence (e.g.: youth were increasingly charged with minor assaults for behaviours such as shoving rather than being diverted away from the criminal justice system) (Artz, Stoneman, & Reitsma-Street, 2012; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006); the media’s sustained focus on newsworthy crimes such as ‘girl violence’ rather than more common crimes such as violence committed by boys; and the increased use of psy-discourses that pathologize the criminalized behaviours of girls as ‘unfeminine’ (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006).

Interestingly, Alquizola and Ryo Hirabayashi (2003), Kilty (2010), and Rapping (2003) argue that media images reflect changing socio-political relations between groups where groups are portrayed differently at different times. For instance, prior to the 1950s, both male and female

youth⁷ were (re)presented as clean cut, obedient, carefree, innocent, and untroubled (Kilty, 2010; Rapping, 2003). From the 1950s onward, Faith (1993) claims that media depicted young girls as losing their ‘girlish innocence’ and traditional values and became commonly portrayed as lost, wayward, anti-establishment, demonized, disobedient, disrespectful, ‘out of control’, and potentially dangerous to the point that they became society and media’s scapegoat for all things gone awry within the community (Kilty, 2010; Rapping, 2003). Indeed, the ‘problem with teens’ resulted from repeated media coverage because once “we see and hear something over and over again, we come to believe – quite erroneously – that there is a correlation between media coverage and actual incidents of youth crime” (Rapping, 2003, p. 206). In this way, media coverage of youth crimes plays an important “role in the rise in support for, and institutionalization of, the harsh, youth-hating laws and policies” of our times (Rapping, 2003, p. 216).

According to Cecil (2007), entertainment media highlights three explanations of juvenile delinquency. First, and similar to criminalized women, criminalized girls are often said to suffer from medical or psychological issues. When mental illness was advanced as an explanation for female youth delinquency, it was generally in relation to the girl’s obsession with a man or a particular way of life. The second explanation is that teenage offenders are ‘uncivilized’ and represent a new race of ‘super-predators’ for whom there is no hope of rehabilitation (discussed more below). The third is that teenage offenders suffer from a lack of social and moral role models (Cecil, 2007).

A fourth perspective, put forward by Rapping (2003), originated in the 1990s and situates girl violence within an abuse framework that acknowledges the difficult environments that many

⁷ Youth are individuals under the age of 18.

criminalized youth grow up in. Abuse is thought to contribute to female criminalization through several pathways such as running away from home, living on the streets, addiction, poverty, and violence (Pollack, 2006). These pathways and explanations of female criminality came to be referred to as the “abuse excuse” and provoked a virulent backlash against explanations and legal defenses that explain a young person’s criminal behaviour against a backdrop of their personal (i.e.: social and familial) experiences (Rapping, 2003, p. 221). Acknowledging some of the context surrounding youth crime led to media narratives that youth were getting ‘let off easy’ and to backlash against the “mushy-headed liberals” that criticized harsh sanctions for youth (Rapping, 2003, p. 221). Unfortunately, such individual explanations of youth criminality relied on dated narratives of criminal youth as “biologically tainted, cursed, alien beings beyond our help or responsibility” (Rapping, 2003, p. 227) which led to mediated representations of youth criminals as ‘bad girls’ or ‘super-predators’ (Cecil, 2007; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Rapping, 2003). Indeed, of these perspectives, it is the super-predator that became the go-to image of juvenile delinquents in the early 1990s (Cecil, 2007; Rapping, 2003).

Youth ‘super-predators’ are typically portrayed as beautiful, sexy, smart, rich, and spoiled girls (Cecil, 2007) “who have somehow slipped through the cracks of our nurturing, social structures, apparently because they are genetic mutants, ‘bad seeds’ inexplicably emerging from our warm fertile soil” (Rapping, 2003, p. 201). Generally, Hollywood films depict delinquent white female characters as ‘normal’ teenagers who look older than their years due to their overt sexuality (Cecil, 2007; Faith 1993). Indeed, white girls were (positively) (re)presented as pretty, feminine, and privileged compared to non-white girls. White girls were also (negatively) depicted as cold, spoiled, and having a sense of entitlement (presumably fuelling their violent behaviours); while non-white girls’ ‘Otherness’ was emphasized by drawing on

stereotypes that (re)presented them as dirty, dangerous, exotic, hyper-sexed, and masculine (Alquizola & Ryo Hirabayashi, 2003; Cecil, 2007, p. 81; Huckerby, 2003; Vanderberg, Brennan, & Chesney-Lind, 2013).

Far from the televised docudramas of the 1970s that portrayed middle-class teenagers with typical adolescent problems that were ‘fixable’ by social workers and therapists, and the 1980s portrayals of the ‘good kid’ who became an emotionless stranger to their family, the super-predators of the 1990s were seen as ‘out of control’, monstrous, and beyond salvation (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Pearson, 1997; Rapping, 2003). Rapping (2003) argues that:

while crime and prison aren’t necessarily mentioned, the implication – one need only think about it for a moment – is clear: these kids may be capable of anything, and since we can’t save them, the logical conclusion... is the dominant strategy for criminal justice today, [that] is incapacitation, institutionalization, for as long as necessary. And since these kids have been permanently transformed into zombielike aliens, that means permanently (p. 223).

Despite the differences in the mediated construction of the ‘bad girl’ over time, Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2008) argue that:

what is common among these many bad girl constructions is that they usually do not reflect the complexity of girls’ and young women’s behaviors. Often they imply that girls’ violence is simply a by-product of girls becoming more like boys and implying that this ‘masculinization’ is an unfortunate by-product of girls and women seeking equality with boys and men (p. 12).

Indeed, this encompasses the masculinization framework and liberation hypothesis that explain bad girls’ behaviours as stemming from the belief that girls who seek equality with men end up becoming more like men themselves; since masculinity is often equated with aggression and violence, it goes without saying that girls who strive for equality between the sexes become more aggressive and violent (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Kilty, 2010). The masculinization framework represents part of the backlash against feminism as it “lays the foundation for

simplistic notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ femininity, standards that will permit the demonization of some girls and women if they stray from the path of ‘true’ (passive) womanhood” (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008, p. 14).

Indeed, mediated reports on ‘girls’ problems’ generally tend to psychologize and pathologize girlhood which results in blaming girls for their own problems while not paying attention to boys’ violence against girls or sexist and racist institutions that regulate and enforce girlhood (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008, p. 23; Kilty, 2010). Ironically, like women, even though aggressive girls are pathologized (i.e.: seen as ‘sick’), they are still considered solely responsible for their aggressive and violent behaviours. Batacharya (2004) sums up the notion of girl violence particularly well:

Girl violence is an empty concept. It is an attempt to make simple something that is not simple. It will not help us to stop violence against young women any more than it will stop the racist, heterosexist, ableist, classist acts of violence committed by youth or adults. Because the narrative of girl violence relies on good girl/bad girl dichotomy, violence against girls is made invisible; those labeled as ‘bad girls’ are seen as intrinsically debased rather than trying to negotiate survival within a context of violence and oppression (p. 77).

Indeed, without acknowledging the surrounding context, ‘girl violence’ and the various stereotypes of violent girls that play off societal fears of not only (female) youth but also the breakdown of society serve to justify the increased social/moral regulation and institutional control of girlhood (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008).

D) Victims, Battered Women, and Vigilantes

The final typology reflects a complicated mix between victims and perpetrators. Traditional norms surrounding gender and violence generally assume that women should please men and be submissive, docile, and accepting of whatever their male partners do (Jensen, 2001). This includes male perpetrated violence towards their female intimate partners. Jensen (2001)

states that "... violence is an accepted, often expected way to enact masculinity and establish dominance over women... [and] violence as a way of enacting masculinity becomes most likely when dominance is threatened" such as when women have higher social or economic status than men and/or when men feel that their sense of self is threatened (p. 49). Therefore, it is no surprise that women are often associated with being victims, rather than perpetrators, of domestic violence (Renzetti, 1999; Stringer, 2011).

Problematically, victim feminism tends to idealize the notion of the 'good woman' as a helpless victim while simultaneously ascribing aggression, competitiveness, and violence to men and/or patriarchy, which some contend puts women on a moral pedestal (Renzetti, 1999). Assumptions are frequently made about what a 'true' victim is and is not. For instance, true (and worthy) victims are those women who are perceived as pure, innocent, blameless, polite, and free of problems (prior to their victimization) (Lamb, 1999). Indeed, 'ideal' victims tend to generate more sympathy than victims who are not 'ideal' (Christie, 1986). Victimhood has also become associated with inevitable psychological damage and/or mental illness; thus the notion of victims as "damaged goods" reinforces the image of passive and helpless women in need of rescuing (Lamb, 1999, p. 113). Furthermore, victims are expected to develop negative symptoms of their abuse, and their suffering is expected to be long, severe, and pronounced – otherwise, they risk that their victimization may be dubbed trivial (Lamb, 1999). The traditional view of women as victims (and the weaker sex) in need of protection is thus reinforced and may be juxtaposed against the 'evil monster' of the male abuser (Lamb, 1999; Radford, 1993). Additionally, 'true' victims of domestic violence are distinguished from "not really battered, undeserving viragos" because they are typically characterized as middle or upper class, ideal wives, good mothers, good housekeepers, and good heterosexual partners who try at all costs to make their marriage

work (Radford, 1993, p. 195). In other words, to be seen as a true victim one must conform to prescribed standards of femininity, victimhood, and life-history scripts (which are often determined by professionals and medical experts) (Radford, 1993; Renzetti, 1999).

Although women are most often victims of violence, they also can and do commit violence towards their intimate partners. It is important to note that women's violence towards male intimates is most often exercised in self-defence and therefore still occurs within the context of men's violence against women (Jensen, 2001; Renzetti, 1999). In fact, the majority of women who perpetrate domestic violence towards their male partners have experienced violence from their male partners; as such, experiences of victimization are important contextual factors in understanding women's motives for violence (Barker, 2009; Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan, & Snow, 2008). An example of this context is the battered woman who kills her abusive male partner. Women who kill their partners often perceive their (or their children's) well-being and/or lives as imminently in danger – thus defining their crimes as acts of self-preservation or self-defence (Barker, 2009; Frigon, 2003; Jensen, 2001; Radford, 1993; Swan et al., 2008).

Some of these women are diagnosed with battered woman's syndrome which “allows expert witnesses to explain how a woman believed she was in imminent danger even if the circumstances of the killing do not involve the kind of immediate threat traditionally seen within the scope of self-defence” (Radford, 1993, p. 187). Although this syndrome seems to provide battered women with a means for achieving justice in some limited jurisdictions, according to Radford (1993), it is actually a:

double-edged defence with a tendency to fuel images of abused women as sick or passive, mentally impaired and unable to help themselves. Not only is men's violent behaviour marginalized and women's medicalized, but the idea of self-defence becomes incredible.

How can a woman fight back at all in such a state of passivity and paralysing fear?... The defence can be used just as readily *against* women, defining as non-victims those who actively resist violent abuse throughout their relationships (p. 190)⁸.

The battered woman's syndrome can thus contribute to the construction of unworthy victims who actively fight back and resist their abuser (Radford, 1993). Similar to other dichotomous categorizations, unworthy victims are typically thought to be what worthy victims are not. For instance, unworthy victims are often those women who deviate from standards of respectable femininity such as “not behaving as a lady should – for example, drinking or using drugs, dressing ‘seductively’, having an extramarital affair” or “by being too much like a man. Women who engage in behavior stereotyped as masculine [(e.g.: sexual attraction to women)] are deemed abnormal and certainly ineligible for worthy victim status” (Renzetti, 1999, p. 48). In this way, feminine women are socially constructed as ‘natural victims’ while those women who are not perceived as feminine (i.e.: those who commit violence against their abusers) are perceived as inherently ‘bad’ since they transgress the control of normative femininity (Renzetti, 1999).

Anger is another (unfeminine) emotional expression common for women perceived as unworthy victims. Anger is not permitted as one of the acceptable ways for female victims of abuse to outwardly express themselves since “presumably a victim is unable to experience anger as well as fear” (Radford, 1993, p. 188). Indeed, “any glimmer of anger on the woman's part is held up as the most significant ‘evidence’ of a revenge-motivated attack and ‘proof’ that the

⁸ Contrary to Radford's (1993) description of battered woman's syndrome as a defence, in Canada it is used as an explanatory framework by the defence council to contextualize women's use of violence in situations of domestic violence whereby the abuser is killed (Barker, 2009). Battered woman's syndrome is a strategy that allows the defence to introduce expert evidence of the woman's victimization to explain the impact of domestic violence on the accused, why she stayed in an abusive relationship, and why she felt there was no way out of the relationship besides killing her partner (Barker, 2009; Sheehy, Stubs, & Tolmie, 2014).

woman did not need to escape from a violent relationship at all” (Radford, 1993, p. 195-196). In this way, battered women who are angry with their abuser do not appear as legitimately battered (Lamb, 1999; Radford, 1993). Another factor that relates to battered women being perceived as ‘unworthy victims’ is the delay that can occur between the abuse and the killing – abused women often wait until their partners are incapacitated (either by sleep and/or intoxication) before killing them because their abuser is generally larger and stronger (Fattah, 1991; Frigon, 2003; Radford, 1993). Unfortunately, some suggest that this delay contributes to the belief that a battered woman’s violent response to her abuse is akin to a vigilante seeking revenge (Radford, 1993). However, when female victims publicly express anger towards their abusers, but conforms to the worthy victim criteria, “they are put in a framework that describes the anger as unmanageable and overwhelming” – thus upholding the notion that victims are psychologically damaged; alternatively the anger narrative is ignored altogether (Lamb, 1999, p. 126-127).

Despite popular belief that battered woman’s syndrome is a defence strategy that commonly lets women who kill off the hook, these women face numerous obstacles to prove themselves under the law (Frigon, 2003; Sheehy et al., 2010). Indeed, the majority of battered women in Canadian and Australian courts end up pleading guilty (typically to the lesser charge of manslaughter) (Sheehy et al., 2010). The court typically asks three questions that function to put the abused woman on trial for her own victimization: 1) Why didn’t you leave your abuser?, 2) Why were you abused so many times?, and 3) Why, when you finally struck back, did you kill your abuser (rather than simply injuring him)? (Radford, 1993, p. 177). Radford (1993) suggests that “to ask why battered women don’t leave is to ask the wrong question; instead, we should ask what and who prevents them from doing so” (p. 177-178). For instance, Jensen (2001) describes how “low gender equality can negatively impact women’s freedom and opportunities, and these

limitations can push women into situations in which lethal violence is seen as the only way out” (p. 47).

Low gender equality can translate into many things such as battered women having low levels of economic independence (thus limiting their opportunity to escape abusive situations), low levels of employment (making it difficult for women to be financially independent and to provide for themselves and any children they may have), poor social support systems (making it hard to live with family and/or friends), lack of alternative accommodations (linked to lacking economic and/or social support systems), fear of losing their children, inadequate protection from their abuser (as a result of the unavailability of beds in women’s shelters and/or police inability to offer viable solutions to domestic violence), and fear of greater violence when trying to leave and/or once they have left (often when the violence escalates) (Fattah, 1991; Jensen, 2001; Radford, 1993; Swan et al., 2008).

Interestingly, “the gender conditions that keep women in abusive relationships and that simultaneously support men’s control and use of violence to maintain their power increase the likelihood that women will kill their intimate partners” since these women often feel that they have ‘no way out’ (Jensen, 2001, p. 12). Furthermore, many abused women believe that if they do not kill their partner, they will be killed by him (Barker, 2009; Jensen, 2001; Sheehy, Stubs, & Tolmie, 2014). Thus, men’s violence against women and women’s killing of intimate partners are deeply connected and gendered (Barker, 2009; Jensen, 2001; Renzetti, 1999; Swan et al., 2008).

One particular case that borders precariously between victim and vigilante is Aileen Wuornos, a long time sex trade worker who was convicted of killing six men, all of whom she claims she killed in self-defence (Koolen, 2012; Pearson, 2007). Wuornos did not meet the legal

system's demand for vulnerability and imminent danger as required for self-defence, rather her acts were considered by many as overkill – which is associated with extreme rage and a loss of control (Pearson, 2007), far from the 'ideal' victim. However:

Wuornos maintains that she took the law into her own hands because she was tired of the legal system letting men 'get away with' harming women, especially those who are socially marginalised. Her description of these violent men as being 'out of control' positions her own actions as a rational response to confronting sexual aggression, and thereby counters portrayals of her as a hysterical woman who killed because she was unable to control her rage (Koolen, 2012, p. 233).

Indeed, vigilantism, also referred to as 'auto-justice', occurs when an individual adopts the role of the victim, which then provides "strong motivations and justifications for offending" that transform the "victim into a ruthless victimizer" (Fattah, 1991, p. 147).

Always unrepentant, Wuornos claimed that she was never out of control; but rather she was protecting herself against the men who tried to harm her (Hart, 2008). It is well documented that women in the sex trade commonly experience sexual assault, rape, battery, and robbery by customers – demonstrating that Wuornos' fears of men were not unfounded but rather based on real perceived threats (Hart, 2008; Pearson, 2007). In fact, the number of men that she claimed to service and the number of men that she killed are consistent with the statistics on the violence committed against sex trade workers (Hart, 2008).

Despite years of consistently claiming self-defence, "Wuornos has been depicted as a killer who stalked her victims, lured them with promises of sexual favors, and was compelled to repeat the crime because of a lust for domination" (Hart, 2008, p. 63). Legal and media narratives pathologized Wuornos, rooting her mental instability in her long history of sexual abuse – which was ironically used as an argument both for and against her appeal (Hart, 2008). Her history of sexual abuse was used to suggest that she was unable to control angry outbursts that resulted in violence and death; yet it was also used to narrate her as a 'deeply disturbed

victim' that performed violence as a desperate act of self-preservation (Hart, 2008; Pearson, 2007). Ironically, Wuornos disputed claims that her history of sexual abuse impacted her crimes, instead claiming to have acted in self-defence. In this way, she rejected the notion of victimization turning into retaliation and vengeance (Hart, 2008). Wuornos is also said to have believed that "sick girls can't fight back. Empowered girls can" (Lamb, 1999, p. 134).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter sought to explore the surrounding socio-political context that shapes our understanding of women's violence in order to illustrate how women's violence is culturally mediated today. In addition to the prevalence of the psy sciences not only in the carceral system but also in society more generally, selective mediated reporting also helps to shape public attitudes about women who kill. This is often accomplished by juxtaposing dual constructions that encompass stock narratives about 'good' and 'bad' women. As such, gendered stereotypes deserve research attention in order to challenge the way media portrays women who commit serious violent crime and to shed light on the taken-for-granted gendered assumptions about women's violence. The next chapter highlights the major theoretical underpinnings of this research.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY

For most citizens, mass and social media are their primary sources of information about crime and criminal justice (Berger, 1998; Carrabine, 2012; Hayward, 2010). Images in media are often perceived as conveying truth and reality when in fact, they are selected based on their newsworthiness (Jewkes, 2004). Of note is that although the camera does not lie, those behind the camera actively determine what is presented to viewers regardless of its accuracy (Berger, 1998). The authenticity potential of photographs and moving images is tied to the notion that ‘seeing is believing’ and that visibility and the visual are truthful and representative (Lister & Wells, 2001). However, “because there are so many variables in photography... [(e.g.: camera angles),] we must recognize that a picture is always an *interpretation* of reality, not reality itself. A dozen photographers taking pictures of the same scene would come up with a dozen different views of it” (Berger, 1998, p. 79). Another aspect of media that is often perceived as true is the verbal and/or written narrative that is constructed. Media scripts and mediated images have an interdependent relationship in which both support the other in order to construct a “web of facticity” that acts as a host of facts that are presented as both individually and collectively self-validating (Tuchman, 1978, p. 86).

Media’s (mis)representations are an important criminological problem to address because mediated images and narratives become dominant forms of knowledge as they often become familiar, ‘common sense’, and taken for granted as truth (Bourdieu, 1989; Foucault, 1976/1980) at the expense of all other forms of (subjugated) knowledge (Foucault, 1976/1980) – discussed further below. One problem with excluding certain discourses and emphasizing others is that we fail to question ready-made concepts and vocabulary more generally (Foucault, 1977/1980). Essentially, we accept dominant discourses at face value. In turn, viewers often forego

questioning the social and political implications of media narratives and images when accepting the dominant perception of them as truth (Carrabine, 2012). Subsequently viewers are likely to interpret and categorize the social world via the hegemonic values and ‘truths’ that are advanced through mass mediated images and narratives (Bourdieu, 1989; Foucault, 1976/1980). These values and truths are generally centered on scientific discourses that are “produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses” such as educational systems, laws, government and the courts, and media (Foucault, 1977/1980, p. 131-132).

This chapter seeks to explore the relationship between mediated images and mediated narratives – both perceived as accurate and truthful representations of the subject at hand – in order to demonstrate potential implications for criminalized women. In part one, I explain the underlying epistemological position adopted in this research by briefly touching on critical, feminist, and cultural criminology. In part two, I demonstrate the connections between knowledge, truth, and power in media. Next, I elaborate on some of the visual and audio traditions in media. Finally, I discuss categorization and stereotype construction and their relationship to truth, science, and media.

PART ONE

CRITICAL CRIMINOLOGY

Critical criminology typically involves problematizing ‘crime’ and the criminalization process by drawing attention to various social and structural injustices (McLaughlin, 2010), whereas much of conventional criminology’s twenty-first century knowledge has implications for the construction of ‘suitable enemies’ – often those who face the most pronounced social injustices, such as women living in poverty, are those who are targeted by criminalization

practices (Agger, 1991). These injustices and criminalization practices are rarely questioned; to the contrary, they are generally taken for granted and seen as inevitable (at best) and rational (at worst) (Agger, 1991). Indeed, refusing to question the status quo allows for two types of knowledge – dominant and subjugated. Dominant (or popular) knowledge includes grand theories and explanations that often fail to focus on the complexities, ambiguities, and minor details of the issue at hand (Foucault, 1976/1980). The problem with dominant knowledge is that, by the omission of context, it often hides more than it reveals which is harmful because it is portrayed and perceived as true. By contrast, subjugated knowledge is a whole set of alternative knowledge sets that the dominant majority has disqualified or failed to consider (Foucault, 1976/1980). Subjugated knowledge typically involves historical and intersectional contexts (such as gender, race/ethnicity, and class) that are ignored or disguised as irrelevant.

One of critical criminology's main criticisms of conventional (or traditional) criminology is its claim to truth. According to Foucault (1977/1980), 'truth' should be understood as "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" and is linked in a "circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it" (p. 133). Conventional criminology often fails to understand its own investment in the status quo to the point that, in combination with positivism, it has "become the most dominant form of ideology in late capitalism in the sense that people everywhere are taught to accept the world 'as it is', thus unthinkingly perpetuating it" (Agger, 1991, p. 109). In this way, dominant knowledge contributes to repressing our imaginations concerning how social life is understood and how it could be different. This is accomplished by convincing individual citizens that they "can achieve modest personal betterment by complying with social norms but that large-scale social changes beyond this are impossible" (Agger, 1991, p. 108). More simply,

the message is that there is no need to question how things are if one cannot work towards facilitating social, political or cultural change. This argument fits neatly with the neoliberal and neoconservative emphasis on individual responsibility for crime and social marginalization.

Interestingly, critical analysis “turns individual cases and personal troubles into public issues” by presenting the ‘view from below’ that aims to expose authoritative and dominant discourses that are commonly taken for granted (McLaughlin, 2010, p. 167). One challenge to authoritative discourses incorporates the poststructural method of ‘deconstruction’ (closely related to critical theory), which questions traditional assumptions about how we read and write with the goal of “disqualify[ing] the positivist model of a researcher who simply reflects the world ‘out there’” (Agger, 1991, p. 112). Indeed, to poststructuralists every text and every word is “‘undecidable’ in the sense that it conceals conflicts within it between authorial voices” and is essentially contested terrain on which what the text appears to relay on the surface cannot be understood apart from its concealed context (Agger, 1991, p. 112). This can easily be adapted to include other forms of narratives such as speech and/or images. In this way, discourses are an exercise of power that structure social relations and determine which voices are heard (Comack, 2006). As such, adopting a critical and poststructuralist perspective that examines the production of discourse allows us to investigate the discursive content and language that is used to make sense of criminalized women (Comack, 2006).

Without a critical examination of context and content, media audiences are likely to create their own meaning by filling in knowledge gaps and story omissions (Agger, 1991). This is problematic because individuals typically fill these gaps with previously attained knowledge that easily comes to mind and is often based on heuristics, cultural tropes, and stereotypes (that are often inaccurate and do not reflect the surrounding context). Problematically, heuristics and

stereotypes allow the audience to draw their own conclusions based on their previously held assumptions and beliefs about the subject at hand (Agger, 1991). Without critical inquiry it is more likely that an audience will accept dominant knowledge as truth, which further solidifies public dependence on the state as well as a reliance on formal mechanisms of social control (McLaughlin, 2010). For instance, if an audience accepts the notion that women who commit violence are more dangerous than men (a view that is commonly presented in media), beliefs that women should be punished harshly for their crimes are likely to follow. Beyond this, the ultimate goal of critical criminology is to enhance one's grasp and understanding of knowledge and to use this knowledge to inform and transform criminal justice practices (McLaughlin, 2010) – which is also a goal of feminist criminology – one of the two paradigms guiding this research (the second of which is cultural criminology – discussed further below), both of which are included within the broader category of critical criminology.

A) Feminist Criminology

Feminist criminology initially arose from the “longstanding inattention to girls and women caught up in the [criminal] justice system” (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013, p. 289). Like other disciplines, criminology has traditionally been a male-centered social science (Comack, 2006). Indeed, Dorothy Smith (1987) argues that:

being excluded, as women have been, from the making of ideology, of knowledge, and of culture means that our experiences, our interests, our ways of knowing the world have not been represented in the organization of our ruling nor in the systematically developed knowledge that has entered into it (p. 17-18).

This process functions to elevate the experiences of men at the expense of silencing the experiences of women – in this way, women's experiences become subjugated forms of knowledge while men's become dominant. When criminological theories began to include criminalized women, the common perception was that these women were different or Other, with

early theorists likening them to masculinized women that were more dangerous than criminalized men because they transgressed gender norms (whereas criminalized men were not Other since they did not transgress gender norms) (Comack, 2006). What accounted for criminalized women's Otherness was believed to be inherent in their nature. For these early criminologists, criminalized women were seen as monsters, misfits, or manipulators – a view that perpetuates the belief that socially undesirable characteristics are attributed to women's intrinsic nature (Comack, 2006). Unfortunately these early perspectives are still often perceived as true because knowledge, often considered as belonging to men and their point of view, is (re)presented as neutral and objective; this can lead many women to adopt pathologizing and stereotypical explanatory narratives (Smart, 1990). Indeed, “when [the state] is most ruthlessly neutral, it will be most male; when it is most sex blind, it will be most blind to the sex of the standard being applied” (i.e.: the male standard) (MacKinnon, 1983, p. 658).

Although there are several ‘waves’ of feminism, “each school has challenged both mainstream criminology and other feminist theory to more fully account for the complexity of how gender is connected to crime and justice” (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013, p. 290). In particular, a critical feminist epistemology emphasizes a focus on sex and gender as central organizing principles of social life, the recognition of power as an important factor that shapes social relations, and a sensitivity to the influence of social context on behaviour (Daly, 2010). In order to address these foci, interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches have become a cornerstone of feminist research whereby researchers borrow heavily from outside disciplines and import concepts that help explore how gender operates and relates to key interests in criminology (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013).

Despite the variations between the different schools of feminist thought, there are central aspects of feminist theory that cut across the different ‘waves’ such as the notion of patriarchy, and ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ identities (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013). Patriarchy is described by Chesney-Lind and Morash (2013) as a “sex/gender system” that exists globally and is characterized by men’s exercise of power and control (p. 290). Patriarchy functions as a system of social stratification where men’s and women’s tasks are valued differently – with men and male-dominated tasks, such as being active in the paid workplace, being ascribed greater value than women and female-dominated tasks, such as caring for children. Indeed, patriarchal families are often characterized by substantial gender differences and roles (Comack, 2006).

Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann (2000) argue that “... the construct of gender role derives from the general concept of social role, which refers to the shared expectations that apply to persons who occupy a certain social position or are members of a particular social category” (p. 130). Gender roles coexist with other roles such as family relationships (e.g.: mother, son) and occupations (e.g.: secretary, firefighter) (Eagly et al., 2000). While we act according to our social role (e.g.: occupation), we must also act according to our gender role (e.g.: woman) – thus, there are multiple constraints placed upon individuals when they occupy particular roles within particular settings (Eagly et al., 2000). Lopata (1994) also considers a social role as “a set of patterned, mutually interdependent relations between a social person and a social circle, involving negotiated duties and personal rights” (p. 4). In this way, the social person is the set of characteristics that s/he emulates when s/he enters a particular role; whereas the social circle contains the individuals that s/he interacts with in “the performance of duties or obligations and from whom she or he receives personal rights” (Lopata, 1994, p. 4).

Similarly, Chesney-Lind and Morash (2013) describe ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ identities as being enacted within the context of patriarchy, class, and racial privilege. For instance, violent girls and women are often questioned in terms of their femininity and are constructed as ‘bad’ for not adhering to their traditional feminine role. Interestingly, research has shown that many violent girls “alternatively challenge and embrace notions of traditional femininity through interactions with others in a range of settings” (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013, p. 292) – therefore gender is not a fixed identity, rather it is fluid and changing. Indeed, women and men adjust to sex-typical roles by acquiring the specific skills and resources linked to successful role performance and by adapting their social behavior to role requirements” (Eagly et al., 2000, p. 126). Thus, gender can be viewed as a performance – one that “derives much of its stable character from the fact that people have *internalized* (that is, incorporated into their personalities) beliefs that lead them to act in the patterned, predictable ways” (Lengermann & Wallace, 1985, p. 38). Since most people possess the traits they are expected to have (e.g.: women are nurturing) as a result of cultural expectations and adjustments to these expectations, gender roles and identities can be described as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Lengermann & Wallace, 1985). Feminist criminology “involves a focus on gendered meanings... and on how gender intersects with other inequality regimes or identity categories whereby perceptions about gender-appropriate behaviours and roles are intersected by norms and practices related to class, ethnicity, ‘race’, and sexuality” so that it becomes apparent that different experiences yield different versions of truth (Skilbrei, 2012, p. 140).

B) Cultural Criminology

Also falling under the critical umbrella is cultural criminology, which incorporates interactionist, feminist, cultural, media, constitutive, and postmodernist studies (Ferrell &

Sanders, 1995; Ferrell & Sanders, 1995b). Culture often has different meanings in different contexts; however, Edgar and Sedgwick (2008) argue that culture is the acknowledgment that the world was socially created and includes things such as language, customs, beliefs, and values that are often taken for granted and are seldom recognized unless we are away from home or when someone disagrees with us. Cultural criminology is critical because power, conflict, subordination, (in)equality, and resistance are routinely taken into account (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995). Notably, like feminist criminology, cultural criminology allows for the important and necessary reconsideration of traditionally distinct categories of culture and crime that increasingly shape our experiences and perceptions of everyday life (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995). Hayward (2010) goes as far as to argue that crime is visually constructed.

According to Hayward (2010), crime stories are now promulgated as much through images as through word of mouth in such a way that much of what we perceive as true is mediated by images in media and the meanings we ascribe to them. However, the distinction between representation and *actually* seeing is blurred when it comes to the image – particularly when the image portrays issues surrounding crime and criminal justice (Hayward, 2010). Indeed, photography does not capture the truth, but rather contributes to the construction of a particular reality (Carrabine, 2012) through the use of various (audio)visual conventions (discussed further below). Furthermore, the image is so influential that it makes up a considerable part of our experience of crime, self, and society, and is even used as a tool of informal social control, for instance, by showing the audience what is morally right and wrong and encouraging the audience to emote and act accordingly (Hayward, 2010). While mediated images and stories are important objects of cultural criminological research, it is nonetheless important to pay heed to critiques

made by critical criminologists in regards to positivism's focus on tangible and (most often) quantitative research:

simply importing images into a discipline defined by words and numbers is in fact likely to *retard* the development of a visual [and cultural] criminology, since it will leave in place the ugly notion that written or numeric analyses can somehow penetrate the obfuscation, conquer the opaqueness, of the images (Ferrell, Hayward, and Young, 2008, p. 185).

Indeed, “no aesthetic judgment or any cultural form is ever ‘innocent’ and will always involve certain kinds of social [and political] power” that appears neutral and ultimately functions to mask certain social realities (Carrabine, 2012, p. 465). The media accomplish the complex goals of serving the interests of powerful bureaucratic structures and the large apparatus of social control through the dissemination of messages that are “unrealistically clear-cut and understandable” (Sanders & Lyon, 1995, p. 25) – similar to Jewkes (2004) newsworthy criterion of simplicity. These messages are put forward as ‘the way things really are’ while also identifying who misbehaves, why they misbehave, and the consequences of such misbehaviour (Sanders & Lyon, 1995). The distance between perception and ‘reality’ is especially great in criminal cases in which legal agents and/or media personnel respond to, narrate, and thus construct events that they did not actually observe (Barak, 1995). This distance is what enables the average person to easily and quickly make sense of crime coverage in media, although it typically encourages the dualistic pitting of ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ characters (Barak, 1995).

Examining mediated images and stories about crime is an important component of cultural criminology as “making sense of culture means paying close attention to [mediated] crime and criminalization” (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995, p. 11). This is so because media help shape the intersections of culture and crime in that media outlets do not simply report on crime, rather they actively construct crime and perceptions of it (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995; Sanders & Lyon,

1995). Indeed, Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1991) argue that “there is no real distinction between facts, information, and knowledge. They are all a result of interpretation through communication practices that give them meaning in the contexts of their use” (p. 208). Thus although information and knowledge may have different meanings, they are still directly tied to the context from within which they are employed such that, when removed from their original context, information and knowledge can be transformed into something that is unrelated to its original meaning (Agger, 1991; Ericson et al., 1991).

Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1991) make an interesting argument that an inherent part of journalism is “the fact of fiction” in which “every use of language, every classification has an element of fiction because it is not the thing itself” (p. 91). Indeed, “fiction is bound up with our ways of imaginatively construing the world, of visualizing what something is in order to know it and act upon it. Organized life depends upon acting as if things are as they have been imaginatively construed” (Ericson et al., 1991, p. 91). In other words, the status quo resists alternative interpretations and questioning the seemingly obvious. It is the job of cultural criminologists to explore mediated crime in order to expose the social hierarchies and class divisions that are routinely upheld within these cultural portrayals (Carrabine, 2012).

PART TWO

KNOWLEDGE, TRUTH, AND POWER IN MEDIA

Knowledge is not neutral, rather, it is always perceived from a particular lens (e.g.: a young black woman’s lens is quite different than an older white man’s lens) (Smart, 1990). Sayer (1992) argues that our senses are “conceptually saturated” in that we make sense of the world around us through reference to the concepts we have come to know and understand (p. 51). Because we employ concepts on an everyday basis, we become accustomed to them and rarely

recognize their influence on our ways of perceiving and understanding the world (Sayer, 1992). Many critical theorists argue that it is paramount to examine what appears ‘normal’ (Bourdieu 1989; Foucault, 1976/1980; Garland, 1990; Mills, 1959) – such as our perceptual lens – because what is perceived as normal is most often invisible and taken for granted. Not all knowledge is taken as truth though; in fact, it is scientific knowledge that is predominantly accepted as truth (Foucault, 1976/1980). Problematically, the specific socio-political and historical origins of scientific knowledge can be difficult to identify and are further obscured when the notion of scientific neutrality becomes institutionalized as the dominant perspective in key social institutions such as education, government, law, and media (Foucault, 1976/1980). Indeed, Smart (1990) argues that “certain discourses claim to speak the truth and thus can exercise power in a society that values this notion of truth. The exercise of power is, in fact, manifested in the claim to be a science, because in claiming scientificity other knowledge is accorded less status and less value” (p. 196).

Essentially, scientific discourses that are perceived as true hold the power to subjugate alternative knowledge sets. Truth and power have a two-way relationship in that “knowledge which can claim to be true (rather than belief, superstition, opinion, and so on) occupies a place high up in the hierarchy of knowledge. The claim to truth is therefore a claim to deploy power” (Smart, 1990, p. 196). The meaning and power of a particular form of knowledge is ascribed through discourse (Foucault, 1976/1980). Take for example, how psy discourse has elevated the terminology and categorizations of risk and the risk subject as the primary explanation of criminal behaviour.

One of the ways that dominant discourses are disseminated is through media – in particular, media genres that are believed to be factual such as news, documentaries, and

increasingly infotainment. Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1991) explain ‘fact’ as “that which is accepted as reality... an artifact of communication practices” – in other words, facts are ‘made’ (p. 84). Not only are facts made, but they are made *visually* in the minds of the audience. For instance, “news accounts visualize what happened, why it happened, what it was like to be involved, what should be done about it, and whether any or all of this is good or bad” such that the focus becomes visualizing deviance (Ericson et al., 1991, p. 84). Interestingly, Tuchman (1978) points out that:

to flesh out any one supposed fact one amasses a host of supposed facts that, when taken together, present themselves as both individually and collectively self-validating. Together they constitute a web of facticity by establishing themselves as cross-referents to one another: A fact justifies the whole (this story is factual), and the whole (all the facts) validates this fact (this particular referent) (p. 86).

The visualization of deviance affects the methodological approach to telling news stories since all forms of media must choose what to report and thus what should be constructed as fact (Ericson et al., 1991; Jewkes, 2006; Tuchman, 1978). There are various ways that media visualize facts such as using credible sources, quotations, framing, and visuals (Ericson et al., 1991).

Credible sources are predetermined and purposely selected ‘authorized knowers’ that (re)present the particular interests of the story (regardless of whether or not the individual is in a position to know the story’s intimate details) (Ericson et al., 1991; Jewkes, 2006; Tuchman, 1978). Most often, the sources that are chosen possess the air of being intelligent, well-informed, sincere, and trustworthy while having strong and clear voices as opposed to soft and hesitant ones (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). Arguments from credible sources typically hold weight with the audience because the speakers *seem* reliable, so it is assumed that the information, arguments, and opinions they provide *are* reliable (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). However,

because sources typically do not have a direct stake in the conflict about which they speak, they may emphasize the viewpoints of groups that are far removed from the story, while silencing the experiences and viewpoints of those who are directly involved and/or affected (Ericson et al., 1991). This is problematic since preauthorized knowers generally go unchallenged because they are viewed as legitimate speakers who tell truths rather than opinions (Tuchman, 1978).

Related to credible sources is the process of gaining quotes – getting a “person in the know [to] say it is so” rather than “probing documents for the discovery of competing facts” (Ericson et al., 1991, p. 87). Looking beyond one’s sources may lead to disconfirming the story that was created thus far, which risks having no story to tell (Ericson et al., 1991). Thus, quotes are often used without extensive verification (Ericson et al., 1991; Tuchman, 1978). Another reason that quotes and ‘facts’ remain unverified is due to approaching deadlines. As such, “newswriters explicitly recognize the mutual embeddedness of fact and source” such that “they intermesh fact and source” (Tuchman, 1978, p. 90). For instance, newswriters can report that ‘A’ stated ‘X’; even if ‘X’ is false, it is still a fact that ‘A’ stated ‘X’. Furthermore, multiple sources that said the same thing or support the same story are frequently cited such that ‘A’ and ‘B’ both said ‘X’. In this way, newsmakers are perceived as presenting multiple perspectives of the same reality (thus creating a legitimated reality).

The use of quotes also enables newsmakers to distance themselves from their sources, which consequently contributes to their objective and neutral appearance. Indeed, Tuchman (1978) argues that by “adding more names and quotations as mutually determining facts, the newswriters may achieve distance from the story by getting others to express desired opinions” (p. 95). This is a manipulative newsmaking technique since sources and their quotes are selected in order to promote a particular version of the truth – one that maintains the status quo, is in line

with newsmakers' socio-political agendas, and protects the credibility of the story (Tuchman, 1978).

Framing is another method of fact making that consists of a story being told within a framework that has salience in popular knowledge (Ericson et al., 1991). Taken alone facts have no meaning; rather it is the particular imposition of a frame (e.g.: context) that encourages the recognition of facticity and the attribution of meaning (Tuchman, 1978). Indeed, "... all identification of facts is embedded in specific understandings of the everyday world... understandings [that] presuppose the legitimacy of existing institutions and are the basis of the news net" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 99). Framing a story can incorporate an extensive use of heuristics and stereotypes, which act as self-fulfilling prophecies by re-enforcing commonly held beliefs; any facts or circumstances that contradict or complicate the story are of disinterest to newsmakers and are routinely ignored (Ericson et al., 1991).

Finally, visuals "offer strong validation of the context of the story, and a more direct reading of the moral character and authority of sources" (Ericson et al., 1991, p. 89). Visuals require little imagination from viewers – thus encouraging the audience to think non-critically. Visuals can be accomplished by staging (when a setting is strategically organized so as to give off a certain impression) and the use of props (to sustain dominant cultural impressions) (Ericson et al., 1991). In order to interpret a story as the producer intends, the audience requires 'consumer cultural literacy' (i.e.: the ability to recognize sociocultural cues such as brand names) (Berger, 1998; Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). Props include hairstyle, eyeglasses, makeup, fashion/clothing, and briefcases among other things (Berger, 1998). Props occur frequently, often play motivic or causal roles in a storyline, and are often used together to tell a particular narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). For instance, an individual with eyeglasses and a cup of coffee

standing in front of a wall of books may tell a more convincing argument than someone who is sitting with a Slurpee beside a stack of celebrity gossip magazines.

Another aspect of television visuals is what journalists term ‘fakes’ – retakes, re-enactments, and the use of stock footage – which help to create a flowing storyline (Ericson et al., 1991, p. 90). Fakes also add a more entertaining element to the story by allowing the audience to ‘see’ what consequences are likely to stem from a particular event or action (Berger, 1998). Fakes are especially used “when the reporter faces a distant event, [or] an event that has already occurred” (Ericson et al., 1991, p. 90).

Dramatic visuals are created by the use of audiovisual conventions. Conventions are “understood as a socially agreed way of doing something”, and although our knowledge of them is often unconscious, they simultaneously appear familiar to us (Lister & Wells, 2001, p. 75). The task of producers is to design images in such a way that stimulate and resonate with information that is already stored in the viewers’ collective knowledge so as to elicit the desired effect (Berger, 1998); this previously stored information is both in terms of photographic conventions as well as the human body. For instance, the human body is expressive and through social and cultural conventions – people are taught how to read it (Lister & Wells, 2001). Indeed, “our ability to read the signs through which bodily and mental states are expressed is a social not a photographic skill. The photographer expertly borrows these signs and relies upon our abilities, learnt through our lived experience, to read them” (Lister & Wells, 2001, p. 79).

The “breast pocket shot” (e.g.: a shot of the subject from their shirt pocket upwards) is a good example of a visual convention that is unquestioned and unidentified (yet expected) in mediums such as television news that frequently employ it (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p. 126) – thus demonstrating the need for greater awareness of visual traditions and the social practices

and power relations in which they are embedded (Buikema & Zarzycka, 2011). Indeed, visual conventions are not neutral, and the way that filmmakers use them have particular connotations for the imaginary relationship between the audience and the subject. For example, if a subject is continuously filmed in a manner in which the audience looks down upon them, the audience may be under the impression that the subject is inferior to them. As people gain more experience with photographs and/or films, they begin to unconsciously learn the conventions and how they are supposed to respond to them (Berger, 1998). Berger (1998) argues that "... everyone doesn't interpret a given film the same way. What we see and get out of a film is related to what we know and have experienced in life" (p. 111), which is similar to our levels of consumer cultural literacy and our ability to interpret props. However, it is important to note that these conventions have no absolute meaning since "meaning and effect always stem from the total film, from its operation as a system" rather than its individual components (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 263). Indeed, viewers must "look for the *functions* the technique performs in the particular *context* of the total film" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 263, emphasis in original). However, conventions, together with heuristics, stereotypes, and other expectations and beliefs, strongly lead an audience towards a particular interpretation. Interestingly, learning audiovisual conventions enables viewers to notice when unusual audiovisual conventions are used. When a photographic convention is *not* typically used, it becomes even more important when it *is* used (e.g.: suddenly switching from colour to black and white). The use of atypical photographic conventions suggests that something (e.g.: what is happening at that point of time) is of particular importance (Berger, 1998). Indeed, when atypical camera distances are employed, it signals that something dramatic and possibly dangerous is transpiring (Fields, 1988).

PART THREE

VISUAL AND AUDIO TRADITIONS IN MEDIA

There are several photographic and film traditions that are relevant to this research. The relevant visual traditions are the frame, camera angle, zoom, colour and black and white, and the gaze; and the relevant audio traditions are narration and dialogue.

A) The Frame

The frame is the camera distance relative to the subject and determines the amount of visible context (background information that enables viewers to locate and/or define the subject) in addition to the amount of the subject seen within the shot (Berger, 1998; Lister & Wells, 2001). “The frame is not simply a neutral border; it imposes a *certain vantage point* onto the material within the image... it actively *defines* the image for us” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 252, emphasis in original). As such, the frame can suggest different relations between the subject and the audience since:

in everyday interaction, social relations determine the distance (literally and figuratively) we keep from one another... We carry with us a set of invisible boundaries beyond which we allow only certain kinds of people to come. The location of these invisible boundaries is determined by configurations of sensory potentialities – by whether or not a certain distance allows us to smell or touch the other person, for instance (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p. 124).

Generally, wide frames depict a subject’s location and include long shots (the subject’s entire body with some surroundings) as well as extreme long shots (the subject is relatively small in comparison to their surroundings) (Berger, 1998; Lister & Wells, 2001). On the other hand, tight frames may depict isolation or intimacy and include medium shots (the subject’s face and part of their torso is visible), close personal distances (the subject’s neck and shoulders are visible), and intimate distances (the subject’s face fills the screen) (Fields, 1988; Kress & Leeuwen, 2006; Tuchman, 1978). Kress and Leeuwen (2006) make note that “the distances people keep, then,

depend on their social relation” (p. 125) such that ‘close personal distance’ occurs when people can touch one another and have an intimate relation with one another and ‘far personal distance’ is the point just outside of touching distance (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006; Tuchman, 1978). Framing distances can become convention to specific visual genres. For example, in news, the camera may use tight frames when subjects display their emotions (thereby intensifying the dramatic impact); whereas for expert sources, the frames will likely be a breast pocket shot to increase the appearance of objectivity and credibility (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006).

B) Camera Angle

The camera angle is the viewer’s ‘viewing position’ relative to the subject (e.g.: above, below, or eye level with the subject) (Berger, 1998; Lister & Wells, 2001). Kress and Leeuwen (2006) argue that “angles do suggest viewer positions, but special and privileged ones, which neutralize the distortions that usually come with perspective, because they neutralize perspective itself” (p. 144). In other words, camera angles often appear neutral because they represent the way that we already look at particular subjects. For instance, since children are short in stature, an expected perspective for adults might be one in which the camera angles downwards when depicting children. There are several camera angles that are of particular importance to this research: looking up/shot from below – suggests reverence and respect for the subject, that the subject is powerful and/or threatening (Berger, 1998; VanderWallen, 2012), or to the contrary, is viewed positively (as a child would look up to their parents) (VanderWallen, 2012); looking down/shot from above – suggests viewers’ superiority to the subject and that the subject should be figuratively, and literally, looked down upon (Berger, 1998; VanderWallen, 2012) since the subject is perceived as small, weak, vulnerable and inferior (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006; VanderWallen, 2012); and an eye level shot suggests that the subject is honest and open (Berger,

1998; VanderWallen, 2012) or that there is equality between the subject and the audience (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006).

C) Zoom

Zoom is an important part of film since it draws the audience's attention (Berger, 1998). Zoom has a similar function to the camera frame as they both control the amount of foreground and background within the shot. Zooming-in occurs when the lens moves in towards the subject thus intensifying the image. Zooming-in is a cue that the audience should pay special attention and look for something that may be revealed. Often times, zooming-in suggests intimacy. On the other hand, zooming-out occurs when the lens moves away from the subject. Zooming-out suggests that viewers should look at the big picture and is perceived as providing reason and distance (and thus neutrality and objectivity) rather than emotional involvement (Berger, 1998).

D) Colour and Black and White

Kress and Leeuwen (2006) argue that "colour represents, projects, enables or constructs social relations – it is interpersonal. It is not just the case that colour 'expresses' or 'means' things...; rather, people actually use colour" as a means to achieve specific ends (p. 230). For example, to enhance or intensify the audience's emotional responses (Berger, 1998; Rose, 2012) such as the wonder and awe the audience feels in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) as Dorothy steps through the black and white into the vibrant colour of Oz. Colours also have the power of association since people have seen them before and thus associate them with a variety of things (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). For example, the use of black and white in films is now regarded as highly unusual and generally signifies that the film is a documentary (and is thus inherently 'real' or 'true'), an artistic production, or an historical production that was made many years ago (Berger, 1998). Besides being perceived as real, black and white may also be associated with

being “subtle and tender, but also cold and repressed, or brooding and moody” (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p. 233).

E) The (Subject’s) Gaze

Although Mulvey (2009) describes the gaze as that of the image maker (typically the active male gaze, that also directs the audience’s gaze, towards the passive female body), for this research I am interested in the gaze of the subjects themselves. The subject’s gaze is where the subject (or character) looks within the frame (Lister & Wells, 2001). While looking straight into the camera is frequently used in portraiture photography, news, and documentaries, it is generally avoided in most other mediums as it breaks the fourth wall and sacrifices the illusion that viewers are unseen and undetected voyeurs looking into another world (Lister & Wells, 2001). As such, because the character gazing directly at the camera is an unusual convention, it is something that draws the attention of the audience. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) argue that social interactions and relations are encoded in images in a manner that rests upon competencies that are shared between the image makers and the audience. This means that “the articulation and understanding of social meanings in images derives from the visual articulation of social meanings in face-to-face interaction” (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p. 116). Although a response is not demanded when a character gazes directly at the audience, the audience nonetheless understands how they are being addressed (e.g.: with a friendly smile or a cold stare). Thus, the subject’s direct gaze at the audience creates a very powerful imaginary relationship between them. Indeed, according to Kress and Leeuwen (2006), there is:

a fundamental difference between pictures from which represented participants look directly at the viewer’s eyes, and pictures in which this is not the case... Contact is established, even if it is only on an imaginary level... [This configuration] creates a visual form of direct address. It acknowledges the viewers explicitly, addressing them

with a visual ‘you’... [It also] constitutes an ‘image act’. The producer uses the image to do something to the viewer... (p. 117-118).

Interestingly, the gaze is affected by audiovisual conventions such as framing in that a long distance shot greatly diminishes the impact of a subject’s direct gaze at the audience (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006), while a tight shot elevates the impact.

F) Narration

In addition to visualizing fact, media can also create particular storylines through auditory conventions such as narration and dialogue. Narration is “the process by which the plot presents story information to the spectator” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 86). It provides information that is relevant to the images that the audience sees while filling in gaps in the storyline by providing background information, indicating to viewers what to think about certain characters, framing the plot, and providing the general tone (Berger, 1998). Narration affects what cues viewers pick up on as well as their expectations and constructions of a story (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). Narration is often accomplished with an off-screen speaker (also referred to as non-character narration) such that the audience does not know whom the narrator’s voice belongs to (Berger, 1998; Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). Non-character narration is common in documentaries and is typically associated with objectivity and realism (Berger, 1998; Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). There are several different styles of narration. For instance, narration can either provide subjective depth (i.e.: personal) or stick to surface events (i.e.: impersonal); it can present information directly or through inference; and it can explore or refuse comment on characters’ mental and emotional states (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004).

G) Dialogue

While narration is used to ‘set the scene’, dialogue is used to ‘act out the scene’ (Berger, 1998). Dialogue consists of conversations within the film – it often tells viewers what characters

are doing and infers what characters are thinking while helping to visually tell a story (Berger, 1998). Since narration and dialogue both transmit story information, they are generally considered the most important aspects of sound in film and typically do not compete with other sounds such as music, effects, or background noise (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). Taken together, audiovisual conventions are used to convince the audience of truth, credibility, and moments of particular importance.

PART FOUR

CATEGORIZATION AND STEREOTYPE CONSTRUCTION

Of particular importance to this research is the recognition of the cyclical and mutually determining relationships that exist between mediated images and narratives, societal ‘truths’ (i.e.: dominant knowledge), (scientific) categorizations, and stereotypes (Diagram 1).

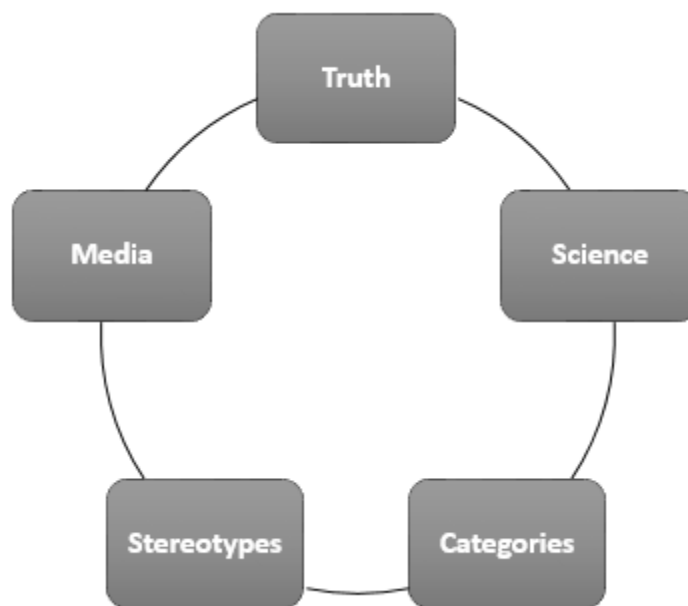


DIAGRAM 1 - RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TRUTH, SCIENCE, CATEGORIES, STEREOTYPES, AND MEDIA

These relationships are particularly problematic when the media (re)present their opinions as facts, such as in the genres of news, documentaries, and infotainment. (Re)presenting media opinions as truths is easily accomplished since media often take up and extend already familiar

and popular knowledge that is rooted in science as well as dominant yet simplistic methods of categorization (e.g.: dualist thinking). Because science is a dominant knowledge and constructing categories is part of science (Bourdieu, 1987), stereotypes that are based on (scientific) categories are also believed to be true. Bourdieu (1987) provides the context for how stereotypes are both (re)produced from and (re)produce classifications:

rather than by scanning all individual members of the category or by considering all the formal criteria required to determine that an object indeed belongs to the category, social agents use as their reference points in establishing social positions the figures typical of a position in social space with which they are familiar (p. 10).

This understanding of the categorization of social groups exerts what Bourdieu (1989) calls a ‘theory effect’ – an air of reality that imposes a vision of divisions whereby individuals who are assumed to be homogeneous are grouped together. Such groupings and simultaneous separations of people reduces familiarity with individuals and customs outside one’s own group; and since what is familiar is often perceived as natural, people from different groups see one another as unnatural – thus leading to a routine lack of understanding about those who are perceived as Other that can perpetuate stereotypes (Bourdieu, 1989). Ironically, due to the assumption of homogeneity amongst group members, categorizations and stereotypes often conceal more than they reveal – thus both should be regarded as “conceptual straitjackets” into which groups are forced to fit (Smart, 1990, p. 194). For instance, Smart (1990) argues that the category ‘woman’ is constructed by language, culture, and symbolic law – not by ‘nature’ as commonly believed. It is the physical characteristics of the body that give significance to and categorical difference between men and women that is so commonly taken-for-granted, seen as mutually exclusive, and presumed to signal natural opposition (Smart, 1990). Indeed, these categorical differences give rise to dualistic thinking and accompanying language that reinforces the meaning of the concepts of man and woman such that different values are associated with different genders (Smart, 1990).

Categories thus become (gendered) stereotypes that “provide quick and easy assumptions that affect behavior toward members of social groups” (Koenig & Eagly, 2014, p. 371).

In order for (scientific) truths, categorizations, and stereotypes to gain popularity, they must be disseminated on a grand scale – this is where media comes in. Bourdieu (1987) argues that media are unfairly advantaged relative to other groups in terms of creating a particular vision of the world, which he refers to as world-making, or:

the power to impose and to inculcate principles of construction of reality, and particularly to preserve or transform established principles of union and separation, of association and dissociation already at work in the social world such as current classifications in matters of gender, age, ethnicity, region or nation, that is, essentially, power over *words* used to describe groups of the institutions which represent them (p. 13-14; emphasis in original).

World-making also allows for class-making that, when disseminated through powerful institutions such as media and the state, (re)produce an ‘official vision’ (i.e.: an institutionalized dominant knowledge that is expressed by officials in official discourse with the effect of legitimating their worldview) (Bourdieu, 1987). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1989) argues that making implicit social divisions explicit is an act of political power that enables the manipulation of societal structures such as law and punishment. Through the teaching, clarification, and dramatization of moral and political events, conduct is defined, groups are categorized, and value or worth is evaluated with the authority of the institutions of science and law (Garland, 1990).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter sought to demonstrate the ontological underpinnings of this research – specifically its focus on critical, feminist, and cultural criminological theories, as well as exploring some of the problems inherent in the relationships between truth, science, categories, stereotypes, and media. Specifically, these problems entail media’s use of self-referential ‘facts’ that visualize and narrate ‘truth’ while subjugating alternative (and possibly more representative)

perspectives of the issue at hand. This allows a particular version of reality to dominate and be widely believed by the masses and which contributes to the stereotyping of criminalized Others (e.g.: women). It is media's position in the hierarchy of truth claims (and their accompanying power) that allows such perspectives to be accepted as valid. While this chapter provided an overview of the underlying theoretical components of this research, the next chapter details the media genre of infotainment and the methodological approach employed in this research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This research project examines how women who commit serious violent crimes are portrayed in a specific genre of media known as *infotainment*. Infotainment is the hybridization of information and entertainment where factual information is presented in an entertaining and dramatized manner (Chandler & Munday, 2011; Kohm, 2009; Rowe, 2012). Infotainment is particularly popular on television and is known to ‘dumb down’ issues (Chandler & Munday, 2011) while blurring the boundaries between reality and entertainment by “straddling the line between fact and fiction, centering on ‘fictionalized’ adventures of a ‘real’ person” (Kohm, 2009, p. 191). Although infotainment contains aspects of non-fiction, such as narration, it is primarily considered a form of fiction media (Peelo, 2005). Furthermore, Kohm (2009) argues “because these programs are presented as reality, audiences may be more likely to take up their ideological messages” that generally deploy a law and order stance – ultimately resulting in the belief that crime is out of control, individuals are solely responsible for their actions, and that carceral and/or psy interventions are the solution to the ‘crime problem’ (p. 194).

As infotainment series often uphold neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies that function to Other criminal offenders, responsabilize the individual for their criminality, and demand punitive sentencing, they also contribute to a particular public understanding of crime – one that is rooted in individual pathology rather than structural factors (Rowe, 2012). Audiences often take information presented through infotainment at face value without questioning the explanations that are advanced (which, for female perpetrators, typically involve ‘mad, bad, sad’ discourses and other gendered stereotypes about criminal women). Indeed, it is these entertaining and familiar stereotypes about crime, violence, and gender that are emphasized in storytelling

(regardless of their level of authenticity and accuracy) and that shape how the audience understands criminal behaviour and individuals found guilty of committing violence.

Problematically, the stereotypes advanced by various media outlets do not often resemble the actual context or circumstances surrounding the offence and the perpetrator yet they are presented as accurate representations thereof. Take, for example, the case of Aileen Wuornos, a sex trade worker who killed six men. It was Wuornos' status as a sex trade worker that ultimately defined her crimes as sexual in nature while simultaneously functioning to obfuscate the assaults that women in the sex trade commonly experience as a result of their participation in this form of labour in a patriarchal society that constitutes men as having unlimited access to women's bodies (Doane, 1991; Hart, 2008; Koolen, 2012; Pearson, 2007). Rather than acknowledging this context, Wuornos is most often described as a 'sexual predator' even though the motive(s) for her crimes (i.e.: self-defence, theft, and/or thrill – depending on which version of events you believe) had nothing to do with sex. It is these 'entertaining' and familiar stereotypes that are added into a story that encourage the audience to understand it in a particular and often stereotyped way.

Ironically, even though violent and criminalized women are often overrepresented in media, they are still vastly underrepresented in research. Unfortunately, "little attention has been paid to how the media frame gender and violence despite numerous studies that show that the media are one of the most powerful influences in shaping public perceptions about crime" (Meloy & Miller, 2009, p. 29). It is true that gender involves not only women but men and that violent men are frequently depicted in media as 'monsters', albeit, not to the same extent as are violent women (Jewkes, 2004). This is likely due to the notion of crime and violence being intrinsically related to hegemonic masculinity, whereas female crime and violence breaks away

from hegemonic ideals of femininity – leading violent women to be perceived as ‘abnormal’ monsters and violent men as ‘normal’ monsters (Faith, 1993b; Kilty, 2010; Jewkes, 2004).

Another under-researched area in criminology, despite its increasing popularity, is the media genre of infotainment. Examining the role infotainment plays in constructing gendered and criminalized characters is important because “the way that we, as a society, talk about women and their use of violence and force has grave implications for social policy and women’s experiences in the criminal justice system” (Gilbert, 2002, p. 1271). Therefore, it is important to identify and address infotainment’s (mis)representations of women who commit serious violent crimes. As criminalized women are said to deviate from particular norms, such representations can also impact perceptions of women (and men) in a more general sense.

Studying representations of violent women specifically within infotainment is thus of particular importance as people are increasingly exposed to televised media entertainment (Meloy & Miller, 2009). Media (re)presentations of gender and violence have far reaching implications such as the use of stereotypical gendered discourse more broadly and calls for more punitive laws and sentences. Although these problems, as posited, currently reside within the context of media (infotainment in particular), it is important to note that the origins of (gender) stereotypes lie within all aspects of our lives. Patriarchy is pervasive, and as such, these gendered values are seen not only within public discourse, but also within the world of academia, literature, and law (Smart, 1990). As such, I aspire for this research to be a sociologically significant exploration of the relatively new media genre of infotainment and to convey how this genre portrays women who commit serious violent crime. Although this exploration will be confined to a case study, part of the later methodological discussion explores how case studies can have meaningful implications that go above and beyond the case itself.

To address the issue of criminalized women in a medium that blurs the boundaries between information and entertainment, this research attempts to transcend mainstream criminology by drawing from multidisciplinary literatures, concepts, and methodologies. Hayward (2010) argues that “cultural criminologists [should] go beyond simple analyses of the static image/picture and develop the theoretical and methodological tools needed to understand the dynamic force and power of visual culture” (p. 3). Hayward (2010) continues, stating that within visual criminology:

It is no longer sufficient just to count or codify images, or even to strive to unearth spurious *causal linkages* between media representations and subsequent human behaviour. Instead, we must approach our subject matter... from various angles and from diverse perspectives. If images are creatively constructed, then we must study not just the image itself, but also the process of construction and the subsequent processes of production, framing, and interpretation. In other words, cultural criminology’s relationship with the image/the visual must be a creative one that recognizes images as carefully crafted moments... [in order to be] at once both creative and critical (p. 14).

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three main parts. In the first section, I discuss my research objectives, research questions, research design, and their significance. In the next section, I briefly review the methodological literature and specify my chosen methods in regards to data collection (including sampling, recording, and storing data), coding, and data analysis/processing. Finally, I discuss qualitative quality control procedures as well as some of the limitations to this research.

PART ONE

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

There are several research objectives for this project. The first research objective is to gain insight into how mediated characters of violent women are constructed within the infotainment media genre, which involves examining if and what (gendered) character traits,

roles, and stereotypes are (over)emphasized within infotainment's portrayal of women that have committed acts of violence. The second research objective is to problematize and challenge current assumptions about this group of women and to theorize what the implications of these assumptions might be for other criminalized women as well as non-criminalized women. Finally, the first two research objectives lead to the third, which is to fill a gap in the emergent cultural and visual criminology literature by adding a concretely feminist analysis to the existing literature.

MAJOR AND MINOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The major research question is: *How does infotainment portray women who commit serious violent crime?* Before moving on, I would like to clarify what I mean by 'serious violent crime'. Statistics Canada (2008) defines *serious violent crime* as murder; manslaughter; attempted murder; sexual assault levels 1, 2 and 3; major assault; unlawfully causing bodily harm; discharging a firearm with intent; abduction of a person under 14, and; robbery. For the purpose of my research, I will be using Statistics Canada's definition; but I will also be adding infanticide (i.e.: the killing of a child by its biological mother) because the Criminal Code (1985) defines homicide as 'murder, manslaughter, or infanticide' and infanticide is commonly depicted in the infotainment series chosen for analysis and thus legitimizes its inclusion in my conceptualization of serious violent crime. In the television show chosen for this case study, *Deadly Women*, the women subjects frequently commit serious violent crimes other than homicide, most notably robbery and assault; however, these crimes are typically committed in relation to the murder that is the primary focus of the series – hence, I retain the term 'serious violent crime' as opposed to 'homicide' or 'murder'.

Building on the primary research question, there are several closely related minor research questions:

- 1) How is (hegemonic) femininity (re)constructed in infotainment?
- 2) How are gender roles and stereotypes (re)constructed in infotainment?
- 3) How do (audio)visual traditions affect the (re)construction of gendered characters?
- 4) What viewpoints pertaining to gender and violence are marginalized or (re)presented in infotainment?

RESEARCH DESIGN

A case study approach was chosen for this project in order to frame and create boundaries within which to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Thomas, 2011). The case study is more than simply researching an individual or a situation; rather the case study adds greater depth to complex situations by looking at things from different angles while also taking context into account (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Thomas, 2011). Indeed, “the case study is about seeing something in its completeness, looking at it from many angles” – which is the essence of good science (Thomas, 2011, p. 23). Stake (1995) argues that it is necessary for case study researchers to provide a relatively incontestable description of the data (e.g.: by providing contextual information surrounding things such as history and culture) to be used during analysis and reporting, and that the overall case should be telling of the story, the situation, the problem, and the resolution (or irresolution). Researchers often use a case study approach when their goal is to provide an in-depth analysis rather than having a breadth of information about a phenomenon that could (potentially) be more easily generalizable to other similar phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Although case studies are not often perceived to be generalizable, Thomas (2010) argues that patterns and connections exist between specific histories and the present day; subsequently,

case studies can be used to loosely generalize findings with other phenomena that share some of the same characteristics and/or general histories.

Baxter and Jack (2008) identify one type of case study that I am particularly interested in. This is when a single case exists but has ‘embedded units’ – essentially the researcher examines the subunits that are situated within a larger case in order to analyze both within and across embedded subunits. For instance, in my particular case study, I will be looking at similar subunits (e.g.: mothers who kill) and comparing each similar subunit with each other, as well as comparing them to groups of different subunits (e.g.: girls who kill) in order to identify commonalities and differences both within similar subunits and across different subunits. The strength of this particular method is its ability to provide a rich analysis that serves to better illuminate the larger case (e.g.: *Deadly Women* – discussed below) (Baxter & Jack, 2008). However, while analyzing subunits, it is imperative to remain focused on the entire case and its characteristics, which is ultimately the goal of case study research.

DEADLY WOMEN: THE CASE UNDER STUDY

Deadly Women is an infotainment series produced in the United States that portrays real crime cases of female perpetrated homicides. While there are several other infotainment series, such as *Snapped* (a series about women who kill their partners) and *Killer Kids* (a series about boys and girls who kill), that depict similar instances of violence, none focus exclusively on women and girls who kill. As such, *Deadly Women* provides a fruitful base from which to answer my research questions. *Deadly Women* is also particularly intriguing as it airs on *Investigation Discovery*, a branch of *The Discovery Channel*, which is known for its documentaries and is believed to be factual.

Each episode of *Deadly Women* is 45 minutes long and is divided into three 15 minute segments, each of which comprises one case of female perpetrated homicide so that each episode consists of three true crime stories. As stated on *Investigation Discovery's* website for *Deadly Women*, this infotainment series investigates:

the motives and modus operandi of female murderers. While males are often driven by anger, impulse and destruction, women usually have more complex, long-term reasons to kill... Through dramatized reconstructions the series investigates the driving force behind female thrill killers. What turns love affairs into fatal attractions. How twisted minds and dark secrets send other women on murdering rampages. *Deadly Women* also investigates the most ruthless female killers of them all – predators (Investigation Discovery, 2013).

These women are investigated by specific ‘expert’ characters or ‘authorized knowers’ that often reappear within the series, such as forensic psychologists, doctors, police officers, true crime authors, and journalists. One particular expert was used in each of the segments, Candice Delong, a former FBI profiler who is described as a “glamorous FBI agent” on her public Facebook page. Candice Delong often described the women’s personal histories and commented on their inner thoughts and motivations, despite never having met them. On rare occasions, friends or family members of the victims were also included. Of note is the absence of the voices of criminalized women themselves and of their family and friends. Only one segment in the sample included a short narrative from a friend of the offender. Furthermore, experts and other witnesses are given on-screen credit (e.g.: job title or relation to the case) so that the audience is aware of their credentials.

A typical episode begins with narration by a strong female voice that sets the stage for the episode. The narrator explains why the women are chosen for the episode – which is generally based on some connection between the women that usually reflects the typologies of their motives for killing. The typologies often become problematic as the similarities between cases

are stretched in order to group the three cases together. This series also uses ‘fakes’ (or re-enactments) that depict the events leading up to the crime of homicide. In these re-enactments, actors dramatically portray the crime as well as the circumstances leading up to it.

PART TWO

DATA COLLECTION: SAMPLING, RECORDING, AND STORING DATA

According to Creswell (2013), data collection involves sampling, recording information, and storing data. In terms of sampling, an important aspect of case study research is determining which criteria should be used to select the sample. In regards to case studies, “a random sample may be worse than any other sample, considering the small number of cases” since an important variable of interest may be missed (Swanborn, 2010, p. 51). Random samples also presuppose that for all units/cases in the domain, a frame from which to sample exists – this makes random sampling in case studies less important (Swanborn, 2010).

Creswell (2013) advances a number of sampling strategies that are of interest to this research: maximum variation sampling, which involves using certain variables to differentiate between the cases and then selecting cases that represent different facets of each variable; theory based sampling, which involves identifying and using different theoretical constructs to elaborate upon and examine for; stratified purposeful sampling, which involves identifying subgroups and facilitating comparisons between them; and combination/mixed sampling, which is flexible in that it meets multiple interests and needs by incorporating a combination of the aforementioned sampling approaches (Creswell, 2013).

This research employs all of the aforementioned sampling techniques and thus best reflects the ‘combination/mix’ sampling method. To construct the sample for analysis, I began by using Creswell’s (2013) notion of theory based sampling by categorizing each of the 15

minute segments based on the stereotypical typologies of violent female perpetrators that were identified in the existing literature (e.g.: mothers, profit killers, girls, vigilantes, and so on). In order to ensure maximum variation in my sampling, I used purposeful sampling based on a variety of differing theoretical constructs such as girlhood and womanhood, and solo and partner perpetrated crimes. By including segments that represented different aspects of the theoretical constructs invoked for the study, maximum variation was achieved such that multiple segments could be compared that were similar *and* different (e.g.: a girl who kills; a girl who kills with her boyfriend). The final sample included 16 segments constituted by four segments for each of the following groups: mothers, profit killers, girls, and vigilantes.

In terms of recording the data, I watched each of the 16 segments a minimum of six times (each viewing involved extensive amounts of coding for audio and/or visual data). During the viewing process, I took detailed notes and wrote memos to better assist with the coding and interpretative sense-making process. In terms of storing information, I downloaded each of the episodes of *Deadly Women*, which I kept on my laptop as well as my external drive. I also stored my notes, memos, coding, and analysis both on my laptop and my external drive.

CODING

Coding is the process of identifying ‘chunks’ or ‘segments’ of data in order to help “locate key themes, patterns, ideas, and concepts that may exist” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 349). The coding process involves assigning words (i.e.: codes) to data segments, condensing data into analyzable segments, sorting similarly coded data segments into groups, comparing and contrasting coding segments to look for patterns, and generating analytic concepts (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 355). A code is generally a word or short phrase that is a summative and

essence-capturing attribute for a portion of data (Saldaña, 2013). When similar codes are clustered together, they facilitate pattern and categorical development (Saldaña, 2013).

A category is a word or a phrase that describes explicit data, whereas a theme is a phrase or sentence that describes something implicit in the data (Saldaña, 2013). Each category should be refined (working within) before comparing it with other categories (working across). Some categories merit further refinement into subcategories. When major categories are compared, data analysis progresses towards the generation of themes, concepts, and theories. Theory develops when themes and concepts are shown to be systematically interrelated – thus going from the particular to the general by predicting patterns of what may be observed in similar contexts (Saldaña, 2013).

Saldaña (2013) identifies several types of first cycle coding techniques. For instance, *attribute coding* “logs essential information about the data and demographic characteristics of the participants for future management and reference” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 69). Attribute coding is particularly beneficial in research that has multiple participants and a variety of data forms (e.g.: transcripts, documents, video) and is good for data management as it provides essential information and contexts for analysis and interpretation. Attribute coding is frequently used in case studies, content analysis, and within cross-case displays (Saldaña, 2013). I used attribute coding to code for things such as the offenders’ and victims’ age, gender, relationships to one another, and so on (Appendix 1).

Descriptive coding “summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). Saldaña (2013) argues that “description is the foundation for qualitative inquiry, and its primary goal is to assist the reader to see what you saw and to hear what you heard in general” (p. 88). Descriptive coding is best

suited for beginning qualitative researchers and studies that have a variety of data forms. It helps to further the analysis and interpretation work. By listing all the data that falls under each descriptive code in a separate document, the researcher can begin organizing and categorizing for further analysis (Saldaña, 2013). I began by using descriptive and literal content codes whereby I coded for topics such as motive, emotions, mental health, motherhood, and so on (Appendix 2). I did this by typology, creating one document for each.

A more complex form of coding, known as *simultaneous coding*, is “the application of two or more different codes to a single qualitative datum, or the overlapped occurrence of two or more codes applied to sequential units of qualitative data” and “is appropriate when the data’s content suggests multiple meanings that necessitate and justify more than one code” (e.g.: when the data under study is both descriptively and inferentially meaningful) (Saldaña, 2013, p. 80). This type of coding is important for noting patterns or relationships between the major codes that are apparent within one single piece of data – for instance, when several major codes often occur together, there may be a relationship worth investigating between those codes. Very quickly, I realized that a significant portion of the data required simultaneous coding since many quotes talked about several different things in one breath. Every time I coded data in multiple ways, I made note of all the categories under which I coded the passage.

Another more advanced coding method is *values coding* which “is the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” and is important to research that explores cultural values, identity, and intra/interpersonal participant experiences in case studies (Saldaña, 2013, p. 110). It is important to remember that “values are shaped by the individual’s specific biography and historic period of existence”; thus value coding may serve to:

explore the origins or the participant's value, attitude, and belief systems derived from such individuals, institutions, and phenomena as parents, peers, school, religion, media, and age cohort, as well as the participant's personal and unique experiences, development, and self-constructed identities from social interaction and material possessions (Saldaña, 2013, p. 113-114).

Similar to Saldaña's (2013) descriptive coding technique of listing similar data in separate documents, Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) and Shkedi (2005) describe a technique whereby, once first cycle coding is completed, the researcher combines the separate documents into one document that focuses on the similarities across cases (e.g.: one document for all mentions of 'social role' within the sample). This coding technique was facilitated by putting a 'starter text' at the beginning of a new word document before proceeding to look through all the transcriptions for passages that were similar to the starter text. A starter text might consist of a passage that explicitly talks about motherhood – all passages relating to motherhood are then placed under this starter text, thus creating a comprehensive list of similar data from across the sample. This procedure takes place repeatedly until all of the relevant categories and passages are accounted for. Both Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) Shkedi's (2005) techniques were very helpful to my research – I followed these steps and colour coded the transcripts in order to differentiate between the typologies. I also used identifying numbers in order to distinguish between each case, as well as letters to distinguish between who said what quote in each case (e.g.: N for narrator; P for police officer). Altogether, this approach allowed me to see which categories and typologies were more or less related and which categories were more or less prevalent for which typologies.

In keeping with the feminist and (audio)visual literature, I maintained a gender-sensitive reading of the (audio)visual data that guided the coding of the variables, (audio)visual conventions, and the ways in which these variables are embedded within specific contexts of

social practices and power relations (Buikema and Zarycka, 2011). This research involved six rounds of coding and a spiral analysis method that involved going back and forth between the various stages of research, including code generation and refinement, memo notes, and data (re)analysis (Creswell, 2013; Leavy, 2007). This represents part of the abductive approach that I explain later in this chapter.

The first round of coding consisted of demographic (e.g.: gender, age, race, occupation, and education) and situational (e.g.: background, setting, and props) descriptions of each character within each segment in the sample. The second round of coding consisted of selectively transcribing narration and character dialogue according to what previous literature identifies as important in terms of gender and violence and in terms of what ‘jumped out’ at me as worthy of transcribing for later analysis. This included noting who said what so that I could determine what kinds of authorized knowers said what kinds of things. The third round of coding examined and accounted for gender attributes (e.g.: feminine social role expectations such as motherhood, being a wife, and being a girl) by coding the transcriptions. The fourth round of coding addressed the visual component of my research questions by coding for apparent and frequently used (audio)visual conventions such as frame, zoom, and colour specifically by noting on the transcript when these conventions occurred (thus creating an audio and visual narrative of each segment). The fifth round of coding consisted of taking screen shots (i.e.: still images) in order to demonstrate supporting points for the visual analysis (discussed further below). Finally, the sixth round of coding sought to identify anything that I may have missed from the previous rounds of coding.

DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

The analytic strategy employed in this research is qualitative content analysis. During the analysis phase, it is important to keep the research design in mind (e.g.: the case study). The primary purpose of a case study is to search for overall meaning, which includes, but is not limited to, searching for patterns, overall consistency, and consistency within certain conditions and circumstances (Stake, 1995) – for instance, examining under which circumstances mothers who kill their children are portrayed as bad as opposed to mad. In order to guide the analysis, I first reviewed the methodological literature from a variety of academic disciplines (most notably feminist, communications, and case study research) in order to generate a more holistic approach to qualitative content analysis.

As previously mentioned, I employed an abductive approach in order to move back and forth between the data and the findings throughout various stages of the research process so that the findings reflect any new analytic reflections that I was able to identify. This particular method, which Creswell (2013) terms the ‘analysis spiral’, is similarly described in various researchers’ work, such as Leavy (2007), Reinharz (2012), Shkedi (2005), Spencer (2011), and Thomas (2010), and stresses the importance of embracing both deductive and inductive reasoning by revisiting one’s data and continuously adjusting one’s findings in relation to the literature and one’s interpretations of the data. Regarding visual data specifically, Spencer (2011) states: “the ‘craft’ of visual research requires a balance between inductive forces – allowing the collected data to speak for itself, and deductive forces – structuring, ordering principles derived from theoretical models and concepts” (p. 132).

Particularly helpful when using an abductive approach is the selection of unusual cases that represent diversity and enable the description of multiple perspectives in order to account for

various contexts (Creswell, 2013). In terms of exploring extreme or deviant cases, “one of the first tasks you will have is to determine whether the ‘negative case’ really negates the explanation you have developed and the propositions that might come from that, or whether instead it shows that your explanation does not apply in all circumstances” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 354). No matter the outcome, deviant cases are considered valuable in qualitative research since they often lead to the consideration of new and unforeseen patterns and variables. For this research, the vigilante typology was selected as a deviant subunit because these women are described as killing in self-defence (and in some cases also for revenge), whereas the other typologies kill for a variety of other reasons.

Shkedi (2005) suggests that once the data is initially categorized, the researcher should move forward to the mapping stage of analysis which aims “to specify the relationship of the category in question to the other categories” while also forcing “the researcher to develop distinguishable categories rather than simply... label[ing] topics” (p. 103). There are four simultaneous steps of the mapping process: 1) “compare one category against another, and ask how the categories might be related to one another”, 2) “with these categories and relationships in mind,... [return to the] data and to the initial categories to look for evidence that supports or refutes” the new array of categories, 3) while examining the data, “continue to watch for evidence of properties that may reflect other relationships between categories”, and 4) “try to find ‘families’ of categories, which are patterns in... [the] data reflecting the properties of a phenomenon” (Shkedi, 2005, p. 107).

Shkedi (2005) advanced a very useful technique – the category tree – which prompted not only the organization of my data but also the beginning of my analysis. Building a category tree is a way of visually analyzing one’s data and involves a single category at the top of the

hierarchy (called the ‘roots’ – ironically, it is an upside down tree), which defines what the tree is about. The goal of the category tree is to represent the relationships and hierarchies between the categories. Shekdi (2005) states that “every category in the tree indicates not just its characteristics but also its relation to those categories located above and below it” (p. 109). Once the category tree is completed, the researcher arranges the data according to the order of the tree. With this method, I made several trees to organize my data according to: feminine social role, motherhood, romantic relationships, sexuality, individual biography, biology, emotions, and motive (Appendix 3). Creating category trees prompted a deeper analysis since I was able to visualize the relationships in ways I had not before – thus leading to a greater ability to see the data thematically.

At the manifest level, themes function to categorize organized sets of repeated ideas into implicit topics, which are easier to develop when similar themes are clustered together (Bazeley, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Bazeley (2013) describes identifying themes as falling “somewhere in the process between coding and theory development” (p. 191) and can occur in several ways such as recording patterns or trends in analytic memos, bringing together and arranging exemplar quotes that are similar (and different) to one another, and noting any repetitive relationships between elements within the data (Bazeley, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Theming the data is important to qualitative research that examines participant beliefs, theoretical constructs, identity, and emotional experiences. Rather than using predefined categories, theming allows categories to emerge from the data (Saldaña, 2013). The analytic goals are to reduce the number of themes to those that are essential (i.e.: those that represent the phenomenon and in whose absence, the phenomenon under study could not be understood) and to develop an overarching theme that integrates various themes together into a coherent narrative (Saldaña, 2013). Throughout my

analysis, I remained open to letting themes emerge directly from the data; however, I also chose to explore themes in the data that directly related to feminist interests such as social roles, gender expectations, and the connections between violence and gender.

Interestingly, Bazeley (2013) argues that “stories and accounts reveal the embedded ways in which members of a particular cultural or social group comprehend their world” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 113) – thus qualitative analysis should work on identifying the larger significance and meaning of events for an individual as well as finding connections and interdependencies both within and across data. In order to accomplish this, it is beneficial to pay attention to what is being said as a whole (e.g.: the overarching storyline) and then to compare repeated ideas in order to discern the differences. The researcher can then tease out what the implications of those variations may be (Bazeley, 2013). For my analysis, I attempted to explain how related but different ideas fell under the same theme (e.g.: how violent women were portrayed as simultaneously overly emotional yet also emotionless).

One of the ways that I was able to demonstrate key findings from the visual component of my analysis was by creating visual stills from *Deadly Women*. Using visual stills not only contributes to the visual presentation of the analysis, but it also allows the audience to draw their own conclusions based on multiple kinds of data (e.g.: auditory – transformed into text, and visual – transformed into stills) (Spencer, 2011; Tracy, 2010). Furthermore, Spencer (2011) claims that “using stills retains some of the dramatic immediacy of film and allows accessible visual stimuli which aid understanding. [Additionally] still images are able to capture elements of a narrative and illustrate themes” (p. 136-137). Thus the themes generated from the audio and the visual content can be exemplified through the creation and use of visual stills.

PART THREE

QUALITY CONTROL IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Although qualitative researchers do not subscribe to the traditional quantitative methods of assessing a study's validity and reliability, there remain several important steps to ensure quality in qualitative research. Tracy (2010) sets out four criteria that are of great importance in assessing qualitative research: rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, and resonance. First, *rich rigor* provides face validity (i.e.: whether a study appears to be reasonable and appropriate) and is judged by a researcher's practice of data collection and analysis. For instance, a researcher must document how data analysis procedures were achieved and how the raw data was transformed and organized into the research report. Other markers of rich rigor include an abundance of data that support research claims, enough time spent gathering data, an appropriate sample that reflects the goals of the study, and proper steps taken during data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2010). My research demonstrates rich rigor in several ways. First, I achieved rich rigor by using multiple forms of data, in the form of quotations and visual stills, to support my claims. Second, during the data collection and coding phase I watched each segment a minimum of six times and thus spent extensive time watching and listening to the raw data. Third, my purposive sampling method ensured that I achieved maximum variation (e.g.: four typologies – one of which, vigilantes, represented an outlier group from which to compare the other three non-outlier typologies). Finally, this research achieved rich rigor by incorporating methods from a variety of disciplines and by describing exactly how they were employed.

Another method of qualitative quality control, *sincerity*, is characterized by how self-reflexive, authentic, and transparent a researcher is in terms of their biases and goals and what roles these are likely to play in the research process (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2010). Reflexivity

and transparency encourage researchers to be honest about the strengths and weaknesses of the research – part of this entails telling the reader how the researcher knows what they know. Sincerity also includes remaining critical about one’s methodology and maintaining clear documentation of each step in the research process so that readers can assess their appropriateness (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Bazeley, 2013; Tracy, 2010). Sincerity was established in this research by explicitly acknowledging my ontological and epistemological positions in the theory chapter, identifying some of the limitations of this research in the conclusion chapter, and carefully documenting the research and analysis processes.

Next, *credibility* refers to the trustworthiness and plausibility of one’s research findings. Findings should always express a reality that seems true by providing credible accounts of social phenomena. In other words, logical links should be apparent between the data, the analysis, and the argument presented (Bazeley, 2013). This can be achieved by prolonged engagement with the data and/or using multiple sources of data (e.g.: audiovisual data and memos) (Bazeley, 2013) and by engaging an abductive reasoning approach in order to alternatively reflect on data, perspectives, and conclusions throughout the research process (Shkedi, 2005). Credibility can also be achieved through thick description and crystallization (Tracy, 2010). Thick description involves detailing the phenomenon’s context in order to “account for the complex specificity and circumstantiality of their data” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). By giving sufficient details and context, it “allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252) and to draw their own conclusions about a phenomenon (Bazeley, 2013; Tracy, 2010). Thick description goes beyond the surface by including information on the researcher’s interpretation of meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and emotions (Bazeley, 2013).

Crystallization, similar to triangulation, involves gathering multiple types of data and employing various methods and theoretical frameworks to provide a more complex, in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. According to Ellingson (2009), crystallization:

combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them (p. 3).

In this way, crystallization fits neatly with a critical feminist paradigm (Ellingson, 2009).

Crystallization differs from triangulation because it does not assume that there is one valid truth to be uncovered, but rather that interpretation of the truth varies depending on the angle from which we view the phenomenon. In addition to spending a considerable amount of time collecting, coding, and analyzing the data and employing abductive reasoning, this research is also credible because I retained as much context as possible when I coded, analyzed, and presented the data, to enable readers to generate their own interpretations of the data.

Additionally, by using interdisciplinary literature, my understanding of the phenomenon is more multifaceted, thus facilitating crystallization.

Finally, *resonance* is a rather unique quality control criterion that involves the researcher's ability to "meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). Resonance is important in qualitative research because it has the potential to engage readers' empathy and identification with the phenomenon under study even though they may have no direct experience with the phenomenon. The ability to transform readers' emotional dispositions has been termed "empathetic validity" and is accomplished not only with evocative writing, but also through aesthetic merit (i.e.: the text is presented in an artistic way) (Tracy, 2010, p. 845). The aesthetic merit of a text should be significantly intertwined with the content and involve a

story that “moves the ‘heart and the belly’ as well as the ‘head’” – thus encouraging readers to feel, think, interpret, react, and/or change (Tracy, 2010, p. 845) by representing the perspectives and experiences of the subject (Bazeley, 2013). This can be accomplished by using the participants’ language, discussing implicit or taken for granted meanings, and using theoretical and/or purposeful sampling to ensure that the fullness of the studied experience is represented in the data (Bazeley, 2013). This can also be accomplished by ensuring that theoretical constructs fit neatly together into a coherent and organized narrative (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). In order for my study to have resonance with readers, I quote directly from the show to generate names for the subcategories. Additionally, I created screen shots (i.e.: image stills of *Deadly Women*) not only to help demonstrate the findings and to facilitate the readers’ interpretation of the data, but also to develop a more artistic and aesthetic resonance with the readers regarding my analytic interpretations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Media portrayals of women who commit serious violent crime are an important research area to address due to the stereotypical sensational portrayal of crime stories and criminalized women as mad, bad, and sad. It is particularly important to research the infotainment genre as it problematically portrays its content as truth, which can have dire consequences for the public perception of those being portrayed. In order to challenge media (re)presentations of violent women, I conducted a qualitative content analysis case study of the infotainment series *Deadly Women*. In order to answer the major research question, *How does infotainment portray women who commit serious violent crime?*, I combined research methodologies stemming from feminist, (audio)visual, case study, and content analysis literatures in order to shed light on the problems inherent in infotainment’s construction of violent women. In the next chapter, readers will see

firsthand how the methodological approaches discussed in this chapter helped me to generate the analytic findings.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings of this research and serves to illustrate several major themes by highlighting select quotes and providing rich descriptions of the pertinent accompanying visual data. Select image stills were created to show, rather than to simply tell, readers about the visual data. What I found in the data were narratives surrounding the motivations behind why women kill – motives revolved around emotionality which represents the most prevalent theme across the typologies (mothers, profit killers, girls, and vigilantes). *Deadly Women's* overarching narratives boiled down to the argument that women killed because they were either emotionless and void of any 'normal' moral responses, or that they were hyper emotional and unable to control their actions. Both of these narratives were frequently connected to mental health issues – involving either the lack of emotional affect (e.g.: psychopathy) or succumbing to overwhelming emotion (e.g.: depression) respectively. As such, I explain these portrayals of women's violence as trajectories – the first being the emotionless trajectory and the second being the emotional trajectory (Diagram 2). The women following the emotionless trajectory are generally depicted as selfish, in control, manipulative, and sexual; whereas those following the emotional trajectory are generally depicted as experiencing romantic love, past and/or present trauma, overwhelming stress, and visible mental health issues that stem from their unruly emotions. Women on the emotionless trajectory are generally (re)presented as 'bad' since they break hegemonic gender norms by being rational, calculating, intellectual, and purposeful actors; whereas women on the emotional trajectory are generally (re)presented as 'mad' and/or 'sad' since they typically abide by hegemonic gender norms by being romantically involved, irrational, unable to control their emotions, and reactive actors.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First I explore the emotionless trajectory and then I detail the emotional trajectory. Following this, I acknowledge and explain the outlier cases (which are characterized by having properties from both trajectories). Finally, I offer some concluding thoughts in relation to the theoretical implications of the findings.

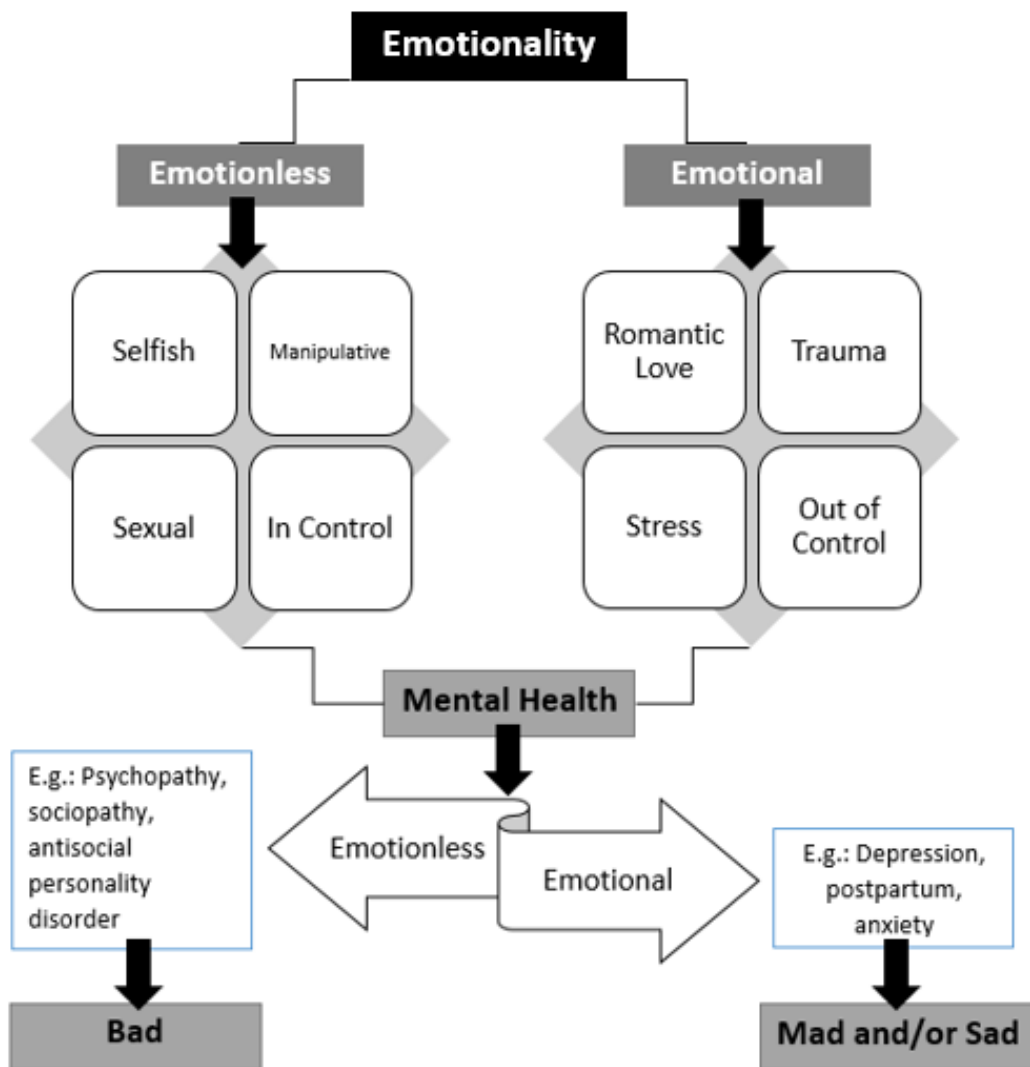


DIAGRAM 2 - EMOTIONLESS AND EMOTIONAL TRAJECTORIES

PART ONE

THE EMOTIONLESS TRAJECTORY

A number of women and girls in the series are portrayed as emotionless, uncaring and remorseless. *Deadly Women* often uses buzzwords and stock phrases such as cold, cold-blooded,

callous, calm and collected, and unconcerned to accomplish this characterization, which reflects what the existing literature states about media constructions of women who commit violence (Comack, 2006; Comack & Balfour, 2004; Kilty, 2010). Interestingly, each typology is portrayed as emotionless when it comes to their victims – such that mothers are described as uncaring towards their child(ren), profit killers as uncaring towards their male intimate partners, girls as uncaring towards their family (and other victims), and vigilantes as uncaring towards those who endanger them (violent men). These portrayals tell a particular narrative when juxtaposed against how women are expected to behave. Expectations as well as behavioural constraints arise from and are imposed by both social and gender roles in relation to one's social positioning (Eagly et al., 2000; Lopata, 1994). For instance, the definition of a good mother typically rests upon the notions of 'naturally' loving and protecting one's child(ren). Mothers who do not follow these prescriptions are typically deemed 'bad mothers' (Kilty & Dej, 2012; Naylor, 2001; Wilczynski, 1991).

As one doctor points out about Diane Downs⁹ (who killed one of her children and attempted to kill two others): “*You can just imagine, your own mother or your own wife, if they lost a child, they would be absolutely hysterical, out of shape, inconsolable, and just blown. She [Diane] was not that way*”. This account functions to juxtapose good mothers (those who outwardly express their emotions) against bad mothers (those who do not outwardly express their emotions). This dichotomous account often obscures the surrounding context that could lend greater explanatory and interpretive power, and simplifies rather than elevates our understanding – thus it can be described as reflecting dominant knowledge (Foucault, 1976/1980) of mothers' violence towards their children.

⁹ See Appendix 4 for a list of all the *Deadly Women* in the sample, what season, episode, and segment they are in, and what crimes they committed.

Similarly, girls are expected to be nice, innocent, caring, and relationship-oriented; and those who do not conform to these notions are considered ‘bad girls’ (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Faith, 1987; Kilty, 2010). For instance, 15-year-old Nicole Kasinskas is portrayed as emotionless since she participates in her mother’s murder. A lawyer states: *“The fact that she could go in to clean up after Billy [Nicole’s boyfriend] had killed her mother, she had to have hit her mother with the door, and then she had to have stepped over her body, to clean up for her boyfriend. That she was capable to do that was chilling to me”*. Here again are notions of what is expected both socially and in terms of gender – Nicole is expected to be a good daughter (as part of her social role) as well as a good girl (as part of her gender role). Ironically however, Nicole does partially conform to her gender role with respect to performing domestic duties (i.e.: cleaning up after her boyfriend).

Not only were violent women across the typologies (re)presented as emotionless, specifically towards their victims, they were also constructed as remorseless for their crimes. For instance, in the case of Stacey Barker, one police officer said: *“I have not seen anything like this in my career for a mother to take the life of their child and actually show no care, no remorse, just to discard her like she’s a piece of garbage is just incomprehensible. I can’t even imagine”*. This particular construction suggests that because no remorse was *shown* that no remorse was *felt* (Wilczynski, 1991) – thus Stacey *must* be a bad mother. Beliefs about seeing remorse are representative of society’s dominant discourses and encapsulate the belief that ‘seeing is believing’ (Foucault, 1976/1980). Stacey never admitted to killing her daughter, instead she told police that Emma accidentally choked on a plastic bag and that she covered up the death because she was afraid that people would think that she was a bad mother. Kilty’s (2010) research demonstrates that when offenders do not admit their guilt, they are perceived as remorseless and

are often believed to be cold-hearted and even psychopathic. Furthermore, Kilty (2010) and Weisman (2004) point to the dichotomy between remorse and remorselessness such that offenders are perceived as either one or the other. This is problematic as outward expressions of remorse are highly influential when it comes time to sentencing (Weisman, 2004) – thus cultural expectations surrounding remorse must be adhered to if offenders wish to be granted leniency. Furthermore, juxtaposing those who conform to what is expected (e.g.: the ‘correct’ amount of crying as an outward expression of remorse) with those who do not conform (e.g.: failure to apologize is said to mean the person is unremorseful) fosters a simplistic construction of ‘public enemies’ (e.g.: those who are considered ‘cold’ and/or expressionless) while also failing to challenge these expectations (Agger, 1991).

Female offenders in particular are expected to display emotions in a manner that is emotional yet emotionally guarded when they admit wrong doing and apologize for their crimes (Kilty, 2010, p. 166). In the case of 12-year-old J.R. who orchestrated the murders of her parents and younger brother with her 23-year-old boyfriend, one crime reporter claimed that both J.R. and her boyfriend: “... *weren’t displaying any outward signs of grief or trauma of what had happened*”. Thus, they were both characterized as unremorseful and even psychopathic as remorselessness is one of the key traits of psychopathy (Weisman, 2008), a disorder that is generally thought to be an incurable mental health condition in which the afflicted are not believed to feel emotions (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). This assumes that remorse (and emotions more generally) can be determined “by merely looking at an individual or by listening to him/her” (Kilty, 2010, p. 166) even though emotional expression varies across cultures and individuals (Costa Jr., Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001).

A) SELFISHNESS AND GREED: WHEN LOVING YOURSELF IS BAD

Deadly Women often portrays violent women and girls as selfish. Perhaps the most obvious way that violent women are (re)presented as selfish is in the case of profit killers who are said to kill their victims for financial gain. These women are portrayed as putting money above all else. Such is the case for Barbara Stager, about whom a police officer claims: “*Barbara is a greedy person, she’s all about the dollar*”. This narrative is accompanied by a dramatic visual that looks slightly up at Barbara from a close personal distance while she plays with a pearl necklace in her hands that she has tightly grasped to her chest. Barbara smirks and stares directly into the camera – at which point the shot turns into a black and white still image. Drawing from Berger’s (1998) and Ericson, Baranek, and Chan’s (1991) research on props that convey dominant cultural impressions, one can deduce that the necklace, in addition to the position of her grasp, visually depict Barbara’s greed, while her direct gaze at the audience and the camera angle that positions the audience below her show her power and threatening nature. Furthermore, the sudden use of black and white increases the perception of coldness and emotionlessness (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006) and her smirk is an indicator of her uncaring and selfish character (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1 - BARBRA STAGER (PROFIT KILLER) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2010)
SEASON 4, EPISODE 3, “FORTUNE HUNTERS”

Even women who claimed self-defence as their motive for killing were sometimes portrayed as selfish and greedy. For instance, in the case of Aileen Wuornos, the narrator claims: *“The proceeds of murder become Aileen’s insurance policy – scared of losing Ty [Aileen’s long term girlfriend] to other women, Aileen uses the money to keep her affections”*. The accompanying visual is a close personal distance shot that looks down on Ty in bed while she takes a nap. Slowly, twenty-dollar bills descend over Ty’s face and body. Ty wakes and looks up at the money falling on her. A close personal distance shot looking upwards reveals that the source of the bills is Aileen. Aileen smiles widely and continues dropping money slowly over Ty. Ty picks up all the bills and smiles up at Aileen. This scene uses these particular props and camera angles which, according to Berger (1998), Lister and Wells (2001), and Kress and Leeuwen (2006), encourage the audience to believe certain things about those who are depicted from above and below – namely that Aileen is the one with power (and guilty), while Ty is vulnerable (and innocent). This scene portrays Aileen as not only greedy for financial and

material gain but also for love since Aileen was afraid of losing Ty if she did not financially provide for her – thus Aileen was said to kill for both money and love despite her continuous claims of self-defence.

Other women in the sample were also constructed as selfish in regards to romantic relationships – specifically by putting these relationships first at the expense of others. Not surprisingly, profit killers were not depicted as experiencing romantic love since they killed their intimate partners for money. However, this portrayal was similarly apparent in the mother and girl typologies. Of note is that the mothers who were characterized as experiencing romantic love were also those who were portrayed as emotionless and selfish – thus these mothers were dually constructed as emotional (loving their partners) and emotionless (not loving their children). This dual construction is a trend that is apparent across the typologies within the sample (Appendix 5¹⁰). For instance, although good mothers are expected to go above and beyond for their children, they are also expected to go above and beyond for their romantic loves, albeit not at the expense of their children. The narratives created by *Deadly Women* depict mothers who put romantic love before familial love as inherently bad, uncaring, and selfish mothers. These portrayals represent the hierarchy of expectations inherent in one's gendered social role (Eagly et al., 2000; Lopata, 1994). Problematically, the selfish act of putting romance before children is portrayed as having fatal consequences. For instance, Diane Downs is said to have been obsessed with her boyfriend, who was married to another woman; when he rejects her she is unable to cope and decides to kill her children because she believes that this will save the relationship. A reporter claims that: "*Her obsession was becoming a fatal attraction for those who simply got in her way*". This narrative seems to confirm that Diane's decision to kill her children was an act of selfishness and

¹⁰ See Appendix 5 for a matrix that displays each of the cases and how they relate to the trajectories and related variables.

desperation in response to the rejection of the man that she was ‘obsessed’ with – specifically that she would do anything to save the relationship at the expense of her children.

Furthering Diane’s construction as emotionless and selfish, a police officer claims that: *“Ultimately the motive was to get that boyfriend. He didn’t want to be a father. She [Diane] saw those kids as a burden and she had to get them out of the way”*. Alternative narratives, such as feeling overwhelmed or stressed by (single) motherhood, were not taken into account. Indeed, certain accounts were subjugated (for instance, discussions about the children’s father were completely absent from the segment) while other accounts (e.g.: selfishness) were elevated and presented as the truth.

Women who kill were also (re)presented as going after what they wanted at all costs. In the case of Stacey Barker, Candice Delong questioned Stacey’s motherhood:

“I’m not sure why Stacey even had Emma – she essentially dumped her on her parents. Stacey wanted more and more and more freedom – freedom to go out to party, to date, to be with her friends... Emma was a burden, Stacey wanted her freedom; Emma had to go”.

In this way, mothers who want freedom, perhaps mothers who behave like many fathers do (e.g.: going out and neglecting their family and household responsibilities), are negatively constructed as lacking maternal instincts that are assumed to be inherent to all women. Indeed, maternal instincts represent expectations of one’s gendered social roles (Eagly et al., 2000; Lopata, 1994). This is reminiscent of the backlash against feminism in response to the belief that women seeking equality with men are more masculine than women who do not seek equality with men (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Kilty, 2010); for example, by not attending to familial responsibilities and by being aggressive and/or violent towards their child(ren). Such narratives are problematic as they completely remove fathers from the equation – subjugating their very existence while focusing on mothers who are perceived as solely responsible – despite the fact

that more fathers than mothers neglect, abuse, and kill their own children (Naylor, 2001; Rapaport, 2006).

B) CONTROL, MANIPULATION, AND SEXUALITY

Deadly Women often portrayed violent women as ‘in control’ – specifically by being manipulative and using their sexuality. Manipulation is a character trait that is deeply tied to femininity and what it means to be a woman (Comack, 2006) and, following Foucault (1976/1980), given the prominence of this construction, it can be described as a dominant knowledge that is perceived as truthful. Furthermore, manipulative women are perceived as powerful, independent, rational, and calculating since they go after and can get what they want. This was particularly prevalent in the stories about profit killers – who were described as being superficially charming. For instance, the narrator states: “*Annie’s charm is legendary, it lets her get away with most anything*”. This is in line with the literature that shows that criminalized women are often portrayed as untrustworthy (Comack, 2006; Kilty & Frigon, 2006; Miller & White, 2004).

Similarly, Melissa Sheppard is said to be exceedingly charming while she uses her physical appearance to her advantage. A true crime author states: “*She’s dressed very classy and she knows how to use her gender to her advantage*”. Ironically, gender is explicitly brought into the statement but in a stereotypical and simplistic way that assumes women hold sexual power over men. Even Candice DeLong acknowledged Melissa’s effective use of charm as: “*...every man’s worst nightmare... Melissa was successful at making men think that she loved them – what she loved was their cheque book*”. This narrative is in line with literature on black widows that emphasizes their use of femininity to gain power over men so as to take advantage of them (Lugwig & Birkbeck, 2006; Vronsky, 2007). Ultimately, these manipulation tactics are related

back to profit killers' need for control – specifically, the control of their husbands as a means for financial acquisition.

Another way that women were (re)presented as gaining control was through their sexuality. For instance, during Annie Monahan's segment, the scene shows Annie playfully pushing her soon-to-be husband onto the bed before getting on top of him, straddling him, holding his hands down above his head, and kissing him – all while a true crime author claims that: "*It was all about Annie and what Annie wanted; and what Annie wanted, Annie got*". Thus, Annie's sexuality is at the forefront of this scene as she uses it to get what she wants – a new husband and ultimately his money. As such, Annie's sexuality is a tool that she uses to take control of the relationship – a tool that feeds her selfish financial needs.

Diane Downs was also depicted as using her sexuality to take control in order to get what she wanted – male attention. The narrator claims that: "*Police discover her husband left because she was a flirt. Diane had quite a reputation at the postal service in Arizona where she'd worked months earlier*". The accompanying visual is shot from a far personal distance of Diane and a male colleague smiling and sitting at a table doing paperwork. The camera shot is framed underneath the table where Diane is wearing an above-the-knee length skirt and removes one of her high heels to seductively stroke the ankle of her male co-worker with her bare foot. This visual positions Diane as actively engaging her sexuality and thus shows that she is a woman who takes control of situations by making sexual advances. Although this narrative does not specify that Diane cheated on her husband, it does justify her husband leaving because she was a "flirt" and was not under his control. Again, a dual construction is apparent – both in terms of being emotionless (e.g.: selfish) and emotional (e.g.: romantic), and also in terms of being in control (e.g.: sexually) and out of control (e.g.: of her husband). A police officer argues that

Diane: “... *enjoyed having relationships with married men, I think the control factor there was important to her*”. In this way, Diane is portrayed as a bad wife and mother since she is described as sexually aggressive rather than passive (Eagly et al., 2000; Lopata, 1994; Naylor, 2001).

Similarly, Stacey Barker was depicted as using sex to manipulate her boyfriend into staying with her despite him not wanting to assume a father role. A police officer commented: “*She was falling in love with him and she was going to do everything in her power to prove her love to him even if it meant somewhat neglecting Emma*”. Of note is that, similar to Diane Downs, Stacey is dually constructed as emotional (romantically) and emotionless (towards her children). This statement is visually accompanied by a shot looking up at Stacey on top of her boyfriend as they kiss passionately. This scene is interrupted when Stacey’s mother (who is babysitting Emma) calls Stacey’s cell phone. When Stacey realizes that it is her mother calling, she ignores the call and drops her phone to the ground. Stacey then continues to kiss her boyfriend. In this scene, Stacey’s cell phone is used as a prop to encourage the audience to believe that Stacey is a neglectful parent (since she is ignoring her daughter’s babysitter) and the upwards camera angle and Stacey’s position on top of her boyfriend suggest that she is not only sexual but in control of the situation. Although props, angles, and staging of the body do not always have consistent meanings, they are used in such a way so as to strongly encourage particular (re)presentations of the social interactions (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004; Ericson et al., 1991; Lister & Wells, 2001) – namely Stacey is depicted as actively sexual, in control, and selfish since she willing to go to great lengths to please her male partner at the expense of her daughter. Interestingly, all of these segments that depict sexuality do so in a visual, rather than an auditory manner. This may be due to sexuality being easier to ‘look’ at than to ‘talk’ about.

Indeed, while there were very few instances where sexuality was overtly mentioned in the auditory statements, sexuality was highly prevalent in the visual content of *Deadly Women*.

C) EMOTIONLESS ASPECTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health issues that are related to not feeling or expressing emotions were expressed with several buzzwords within the series – notably psychopath, sociopath, and antisocial personality disorder. These psychiatric diagnostic terms were referenced to offer simple explanations of female criminality and violence. An example of this is the case of profit killer Melissa Sheppard, where Candice DeLong states that: *“She told him [her future husband] that God wanted them to be together. I rather doubt that God wanted a nice guy to be with a psychopathic killer but that’s what happened”*. Another example is when a doctor describes Diane Downs: *“She’s a sociopath for sure. She possessed the idea that because ‘they’re my children, I can do with them as I please. I could kill them if I want’. She’s in the right place now [(prison)]”*. In both of these cases, the diagnoses were not supported by psychiatric assessments; neither woman was clinically assessed and diagnosed, they were simply said to suffer from these mental health conditions.

Even more troubling are cases such as Alyssa Bustamante’s in which the narrator states: *“Although just 15 years old, and diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder, Alyssa is tried [in court] as a lucid adult”*. This quote is extremely problematic because an official diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder (APD) must meet several criteria – one of which is age. A person diagnosed with APD must be at least 18 years old and they must have been diagnosed with conduct disorder (i.e.: the childhood version of APD) prior to age 15 (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Alyssa meets neither of these criteria. Accompanying this audio is a disturbing visual from close personal distance. The camera frame initially shows Alyssa’s stomach where she has carved the

word “hate” with crossed out hearts into her abdomen. The shot slowly moves up her body along with her hand that she shapes into a gun and presses to the side of her head. While Alyssa does this, she stares directly into the camera lens – her dark ‘gothic’ eye makeup with dramatic black tears drawn onto her face, smeared red lipstick, and black nail polish all become visual props that contrast against her pale white skin. As Alyssa holds this pose staring at the audience, the camera lens zooms into intimate distance of Alyssa’s face. Drawing from Lister and Wells’ (2001) and Kress and Leeuwen’s (2006) work on the subject’s gaze, social interactions are apparent in film, and being addressed with a blank stare creates unease in the imaginary relationship between the subject and the audience. Thus, even though Alyssa has self-harmed and is in emotional distress, it is difficult for the audience to empathize due to the way she is looking ‘at’ them.

Throughout Alyssa’s segment, flashbacks to this particular scene occur from various angles and camera distances. One example of these flashbacks occurs from far personal distance and shows Alyssa taking ‘selfies’ (i.e.: pictures of herself) in the bathroom (Figure 2). Strangely this scene serves to sexualize Alyssa by directing the viewers’ gaze towards specific body parts, like her exposed midriff, and the fact that she is wearing a crop top and panties. It also juxtaposes her low self-confidence (demonstrated by her self-harm) with her high self-confidence (demonstrated by taking pictures of herself) – offering a very confused portrayal of her character. This portrayal follows the dualistic trend that is apparent in *Deadly Women* – specifically in terms of emotionality – by depicting Alyssa as both emotionless (by claiming her APD diagnosis) and emotional (through self-harm and a history of suicide attempts).



FIGURE 2 - ALYSSA BUSTAMANTE (GIRL) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2012)
SEASON 6, EPISODE 8, “FOR NO GOOD REASON”

PART TWO

THE EMOTIONAL TRAJECTORY

Emotionality is a significant part of the hegemonic definition of femininity (Comack, 2006; Faith, 1987), thus it is considered a dominant knowledge (Foucault, 1976/1980) and it is hardly surprising that *Deadly Women* invokes this popular stereotype. Emotional women were (re)presented as experiencing feelings such as romantic love, overwhelming stress, and depression. In contrast to those cases that follow the emotionless trajectory, cases following the emotional trajectory were not typically (re)presented as manipulative or selfish – indeed, those who loved their partners and/or children were portrayed as doing so genuinely. For instance, *Deadly Women* described Aileen Wuornos’ long term girlfriend Ty as “*the love of her life*” who, due to her long and difficult history of maintaining relationships, she was deeply afraid of losing. Aileen is portrayed as so desperate for Ty’s love that she is willing to commit robbery and murder in order to prove her love to Ty: “*Aileen Wuornos has been a prostitute for more than 20*

years... She's working the highways of Florida, risking assault to earn a living, but now she's found a more lucrative activity – murder... The money is a show of affection for her long term partner Ty". This statement constructs Aileen as not only willing to sacrifice her own health and safety (in terms of injury, assault, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and so on) but also that of those she killed. In this way, the romantic love of violent women is portrayed as desperate, obsessive, and dangerous (Kilty & Frigon 2006).

A) NEGATIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES: CREATING 'VICTIMS'

Throughout the series, *Deadly Women* acknowledged several kinds of negative life experiences that were commonly shown as causing vulnerabilities, such as an inability to control one's emotions, that later translated into certain kinds of behaviours, such as violent outbursts. This is in line with the literature that demonstrates criminalized women's common history of experiencing trauma and victimization (Hannah-Moffat, 2000; Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2006; Radford, 1993; Rapping, 2003; Renzetti, 1999) that is often said to be a prominent pathway for women's criminality (Lamb, 1999; Stringer, 2011). As such, negative life experiences were often constructed as leading to the inability to control one's emotions and actions and thus to the commission of violent crimes. The profit killer typology is conveyed as noticeably absent of references of abuse, neglect, or trauma; however, these women were all in miserable relationships. This omission functions to subjugate profit killers' personal histories – making it difficult to contemplate what their past life circumstances were and by extension if those circumstances played a role in their crimes. This omission also serves to create the narrative that black widows are inherently 'bad women' since their individual biographies are not seen as contributing to their crimes – for which they are solely to blame. By subjugating their histories, profit killers are (re)presented as the least worthy of the typologies to receive empathy. This is in

line with Foucault's (1976/1980) work on the problems inherent with certain types of knowledge – particularly dominant knowledge that subjugates alternative knowledge sets – thus creating a specific and simplified version of accepted reality.

One of the most prevalent forms of trauma experienced by criminalized women in *Deadly Women* is sexual assault. In the case of Christina Riggs, the narrator states:

“In her diary, Christina wrote of sexual abuse from a neighbour and a family member. By 13 [years old], she was desperately unhappy and became very overweight... Christina's childhood abuse had another disturbing consequence in her later teenage years, when it came time to find love, she turned to the only courtship she knew, sex”.

Accompanying the audio, the visual depicts Christina's eyes from an intimate distance as she puts on mascara; then Christina's lips are shown from an intimate distance as she puts lipstick on and forms her lips into the shape of a kiss. This visual sexualizes Christina immediately after portraying her as a victim of sexual abuse who is insecure – demonstrated by her turning around and looking at her body from different angles in front of a mirror while she adjusts her clothes – by using intimate shots to suggest intimacy and closeness (Fields 1988; Kress & Leeuwen 2006; Tuchman 1978). This statement suggests that her abuse led her to mistake sex for love during adolescence, which in turn led to early pregnancies and failed marriages. Candice Delong elaborates: “[*Sex is*] not a good foundation for a long term relationship and raising children”. Here the visual is quite explicit: a black and white still image of Christina, her husband, and two children. Her husband slowly fades from the still image, leaving only Christina and her two children in the shot. This serves as a warning to women that having early and premarital sex will not result in a long-term relationship, which is directly related to societal expectations surrounding women's gendered social roles (Eagly et al., 2000; Lopata, 1994) that expect women to be sexually passive, pure, and innocent (Lamb, 1999).

Another facet of this category is the neglect that some women and girls are said to have experienced in their childhood. For example, Candice Delong commented on how familial neglect in childhood can significantly impact one's adult life during Aileen Wuornos' segment: *"Children that suffer maternal deprivation in their early years, the chance of them having something profoundly wrong in adult life is great, it's great, it's probably 35 to 45 percent"*. This narrative is overly deterministic in that early childhood neglect leads to "something profoundly wrong" later in life such as committing murder. Indeed, victims have often been described as 'damaged goods' (Lamb, 1999), which is a simplistic narrative 'truth' that simultaneously serves to mask the complexities and ambiguities (Foucault, 1976/1980) of victimhood. Being damaged and having something "profoundly wrong" with them implies that their ability to be a rational subject is limited – as though victims turn into irrational vigilantes that violently 'act out'.

Alternative experiences of trauma are described by a journalist that covered Kelly Silk's case: *"When she [Kelly] was seven years old, her mother committed suicide in the bathtub and this has a detrimental effect on her psyche and this is where the darkness starts to invade her... she can't get away from it"*. This narrative serves to create a biological connection between Kelly and her mother's depression such that it is perceived as inevitable for Kelly to develop mental health issues. The narrator argues that: *"Kelly is following the same path that she watched her own mother take... When childhood trauma haunts an adult, the bad memories can be transferred across generations and sometimes the consequences are unthinkable"*. This statement is in line with pathologizing discourses that construct criminalized women as dependent and 'sick' (Donohue & Moore, 2009; Kilty, 2012; Pollack, 2006) – ultimately creating a 'need' for state interventions and programming.

Finally, miserable and/or abusive romantic relationships were most prevalent in the profit killer and vigilante typologies. This is not surprising since all of the profit killers and half of the vigilantes in the sample killed their significant others. Many criminalized women, especially those who kill their intimate partners, experience violence at the hands of their male partners (Frigon, 2003; Jensen, 2001; Lamb, 1999; Radford, 1993; Renzetti, 1999; Sheehy et al., 2010). It is of note that the cases from the mother and girl typologies are not described as having experienced abusive relationships. This is not surprising since three of the four mothers were single mothers and only half of the girls were in romantic relationships, which were portrayed as the primary motive for killing.

In the case of vigilante Anna Antonio, who suffered violence at the hands of her husband, the narrator states: “*Anna is married to a vicious gangster... For 12 years, Anna is a long suffering wife... Sal runs his drug and gun racket with an iron fist and is just as dangerous at home*”. The accompanying visual is a close social distance shot of Anna sewing, while her children play in the background (Figure 3). Anna turns around and tells her children to clean up their mess. In this scene, the sewing machine can be described as a prop signalling the audience’s cultural literacy to recognize sociocultural cues that have implicit yet recognized meanings (Berger, 1998; Bordwell & Thompson, 2004; Ericson et al., 1991). Indeed, the sewing machine signals that Anna is a good wife who, by sewing clothes for her family, embodies what is expected of her gendered social role (Eagly et al., 2000; Lopata, 1994). During this scene, Anna’s partner Sal returns home from work and demands to know why the house is not clean and why dinner is not ready. Anna, wide eyed (presumably aware of what is about to transpire) tells the children to go upstairs thereby acting as a good mother who is concerned for her children’s wellbeing. A close personal distance shot then looks slightly down on Anna sitting by

her sewing machine while Sal yells at her and slaps her across the face. Both the sewing machine prop and the downwards angle serve to depict Anna as a good wife and mother who is a vulnerable victim of abuse at the hands of her husband, which, at least momentarily, creates empathy for Anna's situation.



FIGURE 3 - ANNA ANTONIO (VIGILANTE) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2014)
SEASON 8, EPISODE 7, “SELF-MADE WIDOWS”

Despite the fact that this case occurred in a time when divorce did not exist, the series fails to problematize the outcome (Anna was sentenced to death) which implicitly delivers the message that wives who kill their husbands, no matter how battered, do not deserve leniency. This reflects the fact that few women are able to successfully raise the battered woman's syndrome as a defence for killing their male intimates (Radford, 1993; Sheehy et al., 2010).

B) THE “BREAKING POINT”: OVERWHELMING STRESS

Deadly Women portrays two typologies, mothers and vigilantes, as particularly overwhelmed and stressed, which supports findings in the existing literature that women are often perceived as emotionally fragile (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2010; Faith, 1987; Jewkes,

2004; Miller & White, 2004). The show uses buzzwords and stock phrases such as breaking point, snapped, twisted, cracked, disturbed, possessed, spiraling, and helpless to describe violent women as emotionally overwhelmed. For example, Kelly Silk is presented by the narrator as overwhelmed in her role as a mother: *“Kelly homeschools eight-year-old Jessica, as well as caring for her toddlers and baby; but Kelly is struggling to cope and when she cracks, the children suffer”*. The accompanying visual shows Kelly from a close personal distance as she throws down her book and yells at her daughter for accidentally spilling paint. Kelly then grabs a ruler to physically discipline Jessica. Both the book and the ruler in this scene are props used to demonstrate Kelly’s feelings of stress and resulting aggression. The closeness of the shot functions to depict the emotional expressions (Fields, 1988; Kress & Leeuwen, 2006) on Kelly’s face, while Kelly’s actions (i.e.: violence towards Jessica) depict her as overwhelmed since ‘good mothers’ do not physically discipline their children. Even though Kelly recognizes that she is overwhelmed, she does not seek ‘proper’ help (i.e.: psychiatric help), instead she confides in her pastor. A journalist argues:

“So Kelly does the right thing really, Kelly reaches out, she reaches out to the pastor of the church – ‘I need help. I’m overwhelmed’. Living in darkness, you know what they tell her? Pray more. Prayer, prayer, prayer – that’s going to help you. She goes back home, gets on her knees, but it’s not enough”.

This statement acknowledges that Kelly reached out, but simultaneously blames her for not seeking the right kind of help, which resulted in the continuing development of postpartum depression.

Another way that *Deadly Women* portrays women as overwhelmed is apparent in the case of Amber Cummings. Like Kelly, Amber is also portrayed as not seeking the ‘right’ kind of help that would have meant leaving her abusive husband. Amber’s feelings of being overwhelmed stem from her abusive husband and her fear of not being able to protect her daughter from him.

Amber is constructed as seeing only two possible solutions to her stress – either to kill herself or to kill her husband, an ultimatum that is reflected in the literature (Jensen, 2001). The narrator claims that: “*Amber reaches her breaking point... Nazi sympathizer, James, is addicted to child pornography... His battered wife Amber is about to snap*”. The accompanying visual is a close personal distance shot with a slight zoom in on a black and white still image of Amber sitting against her daughter’s bedroom door in tears. Amber’s hand covers her mouth. On the other side of the door, James assaults their daughter whom he has locked inside the bedroom (unseen). A black and white still image of Amber from a close personal distance with a slight zoom in while she looks down at a gun in her hands follows the first image. The zoom in helps to depict the proximity of this particular moment (Berger, 1998) while the black and white serves to illustrate its depressing reality (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Both the black and white still images along with the zoom function to draw the audience’s attention to this pivotal moment in Amber’s life when she contemplates killing James as a solution to her overwhelming stress and fear. However, the commentary implies that Amber had other viable choices, such as leaving James, that somewhat undermine Amber’s abuse.

C) OUT OF CONTROL

In some cases, violent women are said to be out of control, which is often portrayed as an inability to control their emotions. These depictions tend to equate women with children and even animals, as they are believed to be impulse-based and reactive actors. These (re)presentations reflect the existing literature that documents gendered stereotypes of women as irrational, impulsive, and unable to control their emotions (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2010; Comack, 2006; Faith, 1987, 1993; Jewkes, 2004). One example is the case of Amber Cummings – although Amber’s husband was “addicted” to child pornography, was physically and sexually

abusive toward Amber and their daughter, it is Amber who is portrayed as acting on instinct and emotion rather than reason. As described by Candice Delong: *“Everybody has a breaking point, ultimately take away all the socialization that we’ve been subjected to since the moment we came out in the world, we are animals, and animals can attack”*. This suggests that abused women act out of primal instinct rather than making rational choices to prevent violence; thus battered women are depicted as making rash, unpredictable decisions that have fatal consequences (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2010; Faith, 1987; Lloyd, 1995; Miller & White, 2004). While Amber is blamed for the death of her husband, his violence toward her is left unexplained and is not considered a mitigating factor in Amber’s violent act.

Similarly, Aileen Wuornos was depicted as emotionally out of control, which is said to be apparent in the method she used to kill her victims (i.e.: shooting them multiple times). However, what is missing from Aileen’s segment is the physical and sexual assault that pre-empted her first murder. Aileen claims to have been physically and sexually assaulted by a john who said that he was going to kill her as he poured gasoline over her. Miraculously Aileen managed to escape and fatally shot him (Koolen, 2012). Over the course of the next year, Aileen killed five more men. A police officer explains his belief in Aileen’s lack of emotional control: *“When you have someone shot multiple times, you’re looking at some highly charged emotional state, you’re looking at a lot of hate and some revenge. A lot of people, they use the term ‘overkill’”*.

Kelly Silk was similarly described by the narrator as becoming emotionally out of control for killing her husband, stabbing her children and setting the family home on fire: *“Once Kelly loses control, she can’t stop”*. A police officer furthers this point by incredulously stating: *“The rage and the lack of control that one would be feeling at that point in time in order to go through with something like that [was apparent]...”*. These statements demonstrate the lack of societal

understanding about women who kill their children and the immense stress that many of them face prior to (and after) their crimes. This is in line with beliefs and expectations about gender roles (Eagly et al., 2000; Lopata, 1994), specifically motherhood, and that all women are expected to be born with a maternal instinct that enables them to naturally love and be patient with their children, to cope with the stresses of motherhood (Comack, 2006; Naylor, 2001; Wilczynski, 1991), and thus to have control over their emotions.

D) EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

One of the most common ways that women are constituted as exceptionally emotional in *Deadly Women* is with respect to their mental health. This narrative is also common throughout other media genres (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2010; Loyd, 1995; Skilbrei, 2012; Jewkes, 2004) and thus represents a dominant knowledge and belief system (Foucault, 1976/1980) about women. *Deadly Women* both explicitly and implicitly discusses several aspects of mental health through the use of buzzwords and/or diagnoses that suggest mental illness limits one's ability to think rationally and may lead the individual to self-harm and/or to harm others. Two mental health buzzwords that are commonly used in *Deadly Women* are "postpartum depression" and "depression". For instance, the narrator describes the case of Kelly Silk: "*Kelly is suffering severe postpartum depression and is on the brink of insanity*". In this scene, Kelly is filmed from a close personal distance as she sobs and yells at her children to be quiet and leave her alone as she sits on her bed. Kelly's children are heard laughing in the background and the scene shows intermittent shots of the children playing while Kelly lays down in the fetal position and sobs. As Kelly brings her hands towards her face and closes her eyes, the scene becomes a black and white still image (Figure 4). This shift from moving colour to still black and white further dramatizes an already dramatic scene that depicts Kelly as losing emotional control. The black

and white also serves to elicit an emotional response from the audience (Berger, 1998; Kress & Leeuwen, 2006; Rose, 2012) – in this case, a depressed mood. This narrative positions Kelly as losing touch with reality and situates her violence within a ‘mad mother’ framework – a mother who has previously conformed to traditional gender and social role expectations and whose crimes are believed to result from mental illness – the preferred explanation of child-killing since it soothes societal anxieties about motherhood and morality (Meyer & Weisbart, 2012; Rapaport, 2006) by subjugating the existence of the ‘bad mother’ who wilfully kills her children for her own selfish purposes (e.g.: to save a failing relationship).



FIGURE 44 - KELLY SILK (MOTHER) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2012)

SEASON 6, EPISODE 12, “BURY THEIR BABIES”

Another mother, Christina Riggs, was also said to experience depression; however, Christina’s depression was not a result of childbirth or motherhood, rather it is said to have resulted from perceived individual failures (e.g.: various separations with romantic partners). This parallels the literature on ‘sad mothers’ who are believed to be victims of circumstance, personal inadequacies, and/or biology (Menzies & Chunn, 2006; Meyer & Weisbart, 2012;

Naylor, 2001; Rapaport, 2006). The narrator states: “*A woman’s instinct to protect is one of the most powerful emotional forces we know; but for a mind twisted with depression and self-loathing like Christina’s, that power can turn deadly*”. Similar to Kelly, this narrative positions Christina’s depression as causing her to lose touch with reality and her most basic ‘maternal instincts’. Candice Delong describes Christina’s depression as not only inhibiting her maternal instinct but also as causing an inability to think rationally: “*She was possessed with a black depression and she did not want to leave her children in an unkind cruel world to have a horrible life as she had it. That’s the way she was thinking, that’s not thinking right, but that was her thinking*”.

In Kelly’s case, Candice Delong explicitly situates mental illness as the root cause of Kelly’s crimes: “*Kelly was able to stab her daughter and pour gasoline on her because Kelly was out of her mind*”. Accompanying this narration are two black and white still images. The first is of Kelly with her mouth wide open, teeth exposed, holding a bloody knife with blood on her white t-shirt from a far personal distance (Figure 5) – the blood appears black against her white shirt. The second image is also shot from a far personal distance but looking up at Kelly as she pours gasoline onto her daughter (unseen) (Figure 6). The latter image is shot in such a way that it appears as if the gasoline is about to land on the camera lens (and by extension, the audience) to demonstrate that if Kelly is a danger to her own daughter she is also a threat to the audience. These images are used to create emotional responses in the audience (Berger, 1998; Rose, 2012) while also serving to highlight the particular mood of these scenes (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006), namely that Kelly was depressed, frenzied, and “out of her mind”.



FIGURE 5 - KELLY SILK (MOTHER) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2012)
SEASON 6, EPISODE 12, “BURY THEIR BABIES”



FIGURE 6 - KELLY SILK (MOTHER) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2012)
SEASON 6, EPISODE 12, “BURY THEIR BABIES”

PART THREE

THE OUTSIDERS: OUTLIER CASES

Not all the cases in *Deadly Women* neatly follow the emotionless or emotional trajectories of violence. Notably, the outlier cases are from the girl and vigilante typologies and simultaneously encompass aspects of both trajectories.

A) “DEADLY DELINQUENTS” AND “KILLER KIDS”

All of the girls in *Deadly Women* were portrayed as emotionless (towards their victims – with the slight exception of Nicole Kasinskas who was briefly said to express some remorse about her mother’s murder) yet they were also portrayed as emotional (half in terms of romantic love and the other half in terms of negative feelings – depression and anger). Furthermore, while half of the girls¹¹ were said to have past experiences of trauma and mental health issues (e.g.: Alyssa Bustamante was diagnosed with depression, representing the emotional trajectory, and said to have antisocial personality disorder, representing the emotionless trajectory; while Sharon Carr was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, a psychotic condition that is said to combine aspects of both schizophrenia and a mood disorder) – both key indicators of the emotional trajectory, none were portrayed as overwhelmed – another key indicator of the emotional trajectory. Additionally, perhaps the most prevalent of the girls’ dual construction was that three quarters of them were portrayed as in control (in relation to either their partner and/or their ability to achieve their goals), yet all of them were also portrayed as out of control (in relation to disobeying their family, an inability to control their actions that supposedly stemmed from mental illness, and being manipulated by a romantic partner).

¹¹ See Appendix 5.

Although just over half of the sample was constructed as both in and out of control, the girl typology was most saturated with this dualistic portrayal. As such, control is an important component that makes up the girl typology – the typology that contains the most outlier cases. One reason that girls may represent the majority of the outlier cases is because of their age and the societal expectations surrounding age. For instance, although three out of four girls are depicted as controlling, two of these three did not use manipulation or sexuality (unlike the other cases under the emotionless trajectory). J.R.'s case is the exception of the girls since she controlled and manipulated, possibly with her sexuality, which is not surprising since it was explicitly stated that she looked and acted much older than her age. On the other hand, the two girls who were (re)presented as in control (Alyssa Bustamante and Sharon Carr) are portrayed as not intelligent enough to control or manipulate others; however, this portrayal could also be linked to their depiction as independent since they did not involve others in the commission of their crimes (unlike the cases of J.R. and Nicole Kasinskas whose boyfriends committed the violent acts for them). Following from Eagly's et al. (2000) work on social and gender roles, it is not surprising that three out of four girls did not use manipulation as a tactic for taking control since they were too young and inexperienced to do so.

In terms of girls being in control, Sharon Carr's case is a good example. Sharon is depicted as taking control of her life through violence, which began at the age of 11 when she abused and decapitated a neighbourhood dog. Candice DeLong claims that: "*When a child tortures or kills animals, they're trying to take control of their life. They can dominate, power, control, and their sadistic tendencies over a helpless animal, and that's what Sharon liked to do*". The camera looks up at Sharon from a far personal distance while Sharon looks directly down into the camera lens with the shovel in her hand as she repeatedly strikes it downwards; in

the final scene, the shovel hits the camera lens before the frame turns black. The fact that the angle looks up at Sharon suggests that she is powerful (Berger, 1998; VanderWallen, 2012), while her direct eye contact functions to create a sense of danger and threat (Fields, 1988; Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). The visual induces fear in the audience as it shows Sharon in control of her violent actions while the narrator suggests she is dangerous and could randomly choose another victim – thus Sharon is dually constructed as both in and out of control (Figure 7). There are several flashbacks to this particular scene throughout the segment.



FIGURE 7 - SHARON CARR (GIRL) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2014)

SEASON 8, EPISODE 3, “NEVER TOO YOUNG”

Another illustrative example of a girl taking control is the case of J.R. who was portrayed as manipulating her boyfriend into killing her family. The segment juxtaposes Jeremy’s status as an “*unemployed high school dropout*” (thus unintelligent and easily manipulated) with J.R.’s “*diligent*” work ethic (thus intelligent and able to manipulate). This comparison effectively positioned J.R.’s control over Jeremy: “*J.R. found in her boyfriend, a man, an adult in her eyes, that she could control. He found in her someone that looked up to him; and the combination was*

toxic". Even though Jeremy was 23 years old and his participation in the deaths was acknowledged, 12-year-old J.R. is nonetheless portrayed as the one in power who orchestrated the murders of her parents and younger brother, which easily casts her as a 'bad girl'.

Ironically, J.R. is also described as being out of the control of school authorities (by disobeying the Catholic school dress code), her parents (by continuing to see her boyfriend after her parents forbade it), and socio-legal morals (by participating in killing her family). J.R.'s inability to be controlled by the school, her family, or societal laws is said to stem from the things that she is constructed as controlling – her 'gothic' lifestyle and her boyfriend Jeremy. The narrator claims that: "*A young girl is out of control – obsessed with the dark goth subculture, the 12-year-old is having a forbidden love affair with a man twice her age*". Candice Delong continues: "*I think any child who kills their parents when there is no evidence of abuse from parent to child should be locked up forever, there really is no hope*". This statement is accompanied by an intimate distance shot of J.R.'s face as she stares into the camera. Her dark makeup, eyeliner and tears drawn downwards from each eye and an upside down cross drawn on her forehead (reminiscent of Charles Manson's followers' swastikas on their foreheads), further dramatizes the shot. Both the makeup and the subject's gaze work to construct J.R. as a 'bad girl' (Figure 8) who cannot be rehabilitated – a position that reflects public perspectives on girl violence (Rapping, 2003).



FIGURE 8 - J.R. (GIRL) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2009)

SEASON 3, EPISODE 5, “FORBIDDEN LOVE”

Another example of girls being out of control is the case of Nicole Kasinskas who is one of the biggest outliers of the sample as she was the only one who was depicted as being manipulated by her boyfriend to participate in killing her mother. Nicole is (re)presented as easily manipulated and thus as out of her own control in several ways. First, her father left when she was a child; therefore, Nicole did not have a positive male role model. An author argues that: *“Her not having a father figure in life I think really contributed to her being easily manipulated – it definitely contributed to it”*. Her lack of a positive male role model and the fact that she was bullied at school were linked to her susceptibility to a manipulative male partner. Ironically, although she was a straight A student and thus academically intelligent, Nicole was still portrayed as too immature and not emotionally intelligent enough to avoid being manipulated. Candice DeLong claims that: *“I think the bullying when Nicole was young contributed to low self-esteem and I think that all of that made her really ripe pickings for somebody like Sullivan when he came along”*. This narrative portrays Nicole as a sad victim of circumstance yet

simultaneously positions her as desperate for relationships, a desperation that is portrayed as leading to her mother's murder.

Indeed, Candice Delong states: "*Once again we have a young impressionable teenage girl with pretty much no experience with men meeting someone older who manipulates her and turns her against her own family*". An author also attributes Nicole's manipulation to her inexperience with boys:

"It's the first relationship she's ever had with a boy. It's everything she'd dreamed it would have been, it's the castle in the sky, it's the knight in shining armour that's come to rescue her... [After a while,] she began to hate her mother and Billy Sullivan put that hate in her. She began to think that everything her mother did was wrong. Billy planted all these seeds in her and they began to germinate over a period of time".

Accompanying this audio clip is a close personal distance black and white still image of Nicole (in the forefront) looking at her mother (unseen) and Billy (in the near background) who is looking at Nicole. The camera then zooms out to a far personal distance in order to place Nicole and Billy in context – sitting at her mother's dining room table with food on their plates that her mother prepared for them. Billy proceeds to get into an argument with Nicole's mother and the couple leaves the table visibly upset. Nicole raises her voice saying that she wants to get away from her mother; Billy is shown watching Nicole while she looks at her mother (out of sight) to visually suggest that he is controlling her.

The black and white as well as the zoom out draws the audience's attention to this particular scene (Berger, 1998) in which Billy is manipulating Nicole to turn against her mother. Furthermore, the food on the table acts as a cultural cue (Berger, 1998; Bordwell & Thompson, 2004) that shows Nicole's mother is a good mother thus underscoring the evilness of Billy and Nicole's plan to kill her (Figure 9). These statements describe the shocking and harmful consequences of young love and premarital sex. Nicole is portrayed as a victim of unfortunate

circumstances since she grew up without a father, was bullied in school, and had no romantic relationship experience prior to the age of 15. When she fell in love with her first boyfriend, she was easily manipulated and her inability to maintain control resulted in her mother's death, who was previously described as her "*best friend*" – thus demonstrating the extent of the manipulation that must have been involved.



FIGURE 9 - NICOLE KASINSKAS (GIRL) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2010)
SEASON 4, EPISODE 13, “A DAUGHTER’S REVENGE”

B) “RUTHLESS REVENGE”: (IN)JUSTICE IS SERVED?

The second typology that contains outlier cases is the vigilante group – which has two cases that are constructed as having aspects of both emotionless and emotional trajectories. Of note, the other two (non-outlier) vigilante cases are more in line with the emotional trajectory. Vigilantes were portrayed as following both trajectories since they were described as emotional (three were portrayed as overwhelmed, stressed, and experiencing trauma), yet none were depicted as having mental health issues (with the slight exception of Amber Cummings who was said to briefly contemplate suicide) – an important component of the emotional trajectory. Half

of the vigilantes were simultaneously portrayed as emotionless and manipulative, while one of these two women, Aileen Wuornos, was portrayed as selfish (both in terms of money and love). Thus, while all of the vigilantes displayed various emotions such as being overwhelmed (but not mentally ill) and had experiences of trauma, half were also characterized as indifferent towards their victims and manipulative (traits that encompass the emotionless trajectory).

Similar to the mother typology, half of the vigilantes were portrayed as simultaneously emotional and emotionless – often within the same statement. For instance, Amber Cummings was described by a police officer who did not understand how a wife could kill her husband in ‘cold-blood’: *“It’s hard for us to justify shooting somebody who is asleep in a bed. He looked more like a victim than a shooter”*. What is ironic about this statement is that it suggests that Amber’s violence lacked justification and that she was emotionless about the death of her husband, despite the fact that she is said to have killed him out of fear that the abuse towards her and her daughter would escalate. These differing constructions follow stereotypical and simple explanations of women’s violence – specifically, that they are either emotionless and bad or overly emotional and sad.

This verbal proclamation is followed by a black and white still image that slowly zooms in to a close personal distance looking up at Amber holding the gun while she shoots James as he sleeps. Both the zoom and black and white function to draw the audience’s attention to this moment in time – when Amber decides that she is going to kill her husband; while the camera angle looking up at Amber depicts her as finally having power over James. This particular camera angle suggests the social relation that we expect when a perpetrator exercises violence against their victim – the perpetrator is in power while the victim is vulnerable (Kress &

Leeuwen, 2006). However, in this case, the tables are turned as the audience sees Amber, rather than James, as the primary perpetrator (Figure 10).



FIGURE 10 - AMBER CUMMINGS (VIGILANTE) – *DEADLY WOMEN* (2011)

SEASON 5, EPISODE 7, “BREAKING POINT”

Another suggestion, in the case of Aileen Wuornos, is that some violent women commit homicide not only because they feel “fine” doing it but also because they enjoy the act itself and are thus unremorseful. Candice DeLong argues that: *“There has to be more than that to take a life. I think for Aileen, at some point she enjoyed it – she didn’t need to kill these people to get what she wanted and that’s probably because she felt fine doing it, she had no sense of remorse”*. This narrative, like others within the series, positions Aileen as emotional (e.g.: experiencing joy from killing) yet simultaneously as emotionless and remorseless. These dualistic constructions are highly prevalent in the series’ depictions of women who kill, however they are most explicit and obvious in the vigilante typology.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Deadly Women constructs its female subjects in dualistic fashions – specifically as emotionless and emotional, and both in and out of control. This is reminiscent of Kilty and Frigon's (2006) research on Karla Homolka and her simultaneous construction as in danger and dangerous within media and court documents. While dichotomous constructions of women who kill were apparent in the show, so were two distinct trajectories that implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) outlined women's and girl's pathways to violence. Women within the emotionless trajectory were depicted as indifferent towards their victims, as remorseless for their crimes, and as selfish both in terms of money and love. When it came to being selfish for love, women (typically mothers and girls) were dually constructed as emotionless and emotional since romantic love was prioritized ahead of familial love; however, it is important to note that the series emphasized their emotionlessness and selfishness, as opposed to experiences of love. Emotionless women were depicted as manipulative and as using their feminine charm and sexuality in a calculating way in order to gain control. Indeed, their acts of violence were characterized as attempts to achieve their goals whether they were related to maintaining a romantic relationship, gaining unlimited access to finances and material goods, or killing simply because they wanted to.

On the other hand, women within the emotional trajectory were depicted as overcome by negative emotions (such as overwhelming stress) that ultimately led to their loss of control and, by extension, their violent actions. These negative emotions were typically related back to their histories or current experiences of trauma and victimization which, along with overwhelming stress, were often shown as translating into more serious mental health issues (such as postpartum depression). This is a problematic (re)presentation since it positions women's

violence as directly linked to emotionality and irrationality rather than as a rational response located within the scope of negative life experiences such as intimate partner violence. Furthermore, although negative life experiences and emotions were acknowledged, they were described as *inevitably* leading to violence rather than as *mitigating* factors explaining women and girls' violence; thus while they were victims of domestic violence they were still (re)presented as fully responsible for their crimes. Although it is important not to overlook violence committed by women and girls, it is paramount to consider the context within which it occurs (Kilty & Frigon, 2006).

Interestingly, both trajectories draw upon discussions of mental health – the emotionless trajectory was connected to illnesses such as ‘psychopathy’, while the emotional trajectory was linked to illnesses such as depression. Both trajectories uphold and fail to problematize the utility of psychiatric diagnoses and treatments. As such, they reflect dominant knowledge frames that have implications for the manner in which criminalized women are believed (or not believed) to be receptive to psy treatment (e.g.: depressed women are perceived as amenable to treatment while psychopathic women are not). This sustains constructions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women within both trajectories since emotional women (e.g.: those who are depressed) abide hegemonic gender expectations and are deemed treatable, while emotionless women (e.g.: ‘psychopaths’) break hegemonic expectations surrounding gender and are not deemed treatable. This framing offers only two responses to women’s violence – indefinite imprisonment or intense psychiatric care.

As an infotainment show, *Deadly Women* uses the testimony of certain experts to appear informed and credible. When Candice Delong appears, her title (“Former FBI profiler”) is prominently displayed on the screen, while in the background props, such as a bookcase, are

used within a staged environment, such as an office, that often function to give the impression that she is an authorized knower. Also, the manner in which the speakers are filmed (e.g.: the ‘breast pocket shot’ with the subjects’ gaze towards the camera) suggests that the speakers and the production itself are objective since the camera is not too close but not too far, thus creating the impression of a news or documentary genre. As such, *Deadly Women* is likely to be perceived as neutral and truthful since it is visually associated with these ‘objective’ media genres.

During the ‘fakes’ or re-enactments, staging and props were also used to accomplish particular narratives. For instance, sexuality was often constructed by showing the women in ‘promiscuous’ clothing (such as short skirts) and dark makeup as well as having their undergarments in full view (e.g.: strewn across the bedroom), while in other cases, it was the women’s position in relation to the men’s (e.g.: the women on top during sex scenes). Sexuality and intimacy were further constructed implicitly by the use of extreme close-ups of women’s and girls’ eyes and mouths as they were putting on makeup. Sexuality and femininity were also depicted by showing the subject looking in the mirror, smiling at themselves, making kissy faces, and admiring their chosen ensemble.

Deadly Women uses both taken for granted audiovisual conventions, such as zooming in and out, while also selectively using more unusual audiovisual conventions, such as the use of black and white still images. Interestingly, black and white still images were commonly used and were often accompanied by zooming in or out in order to draw attention to particular moments in the narrative. Other examples include dramatic camera angles or frames that also functioned to draw the audience’s attention. Of particular note was the regularity with which characters broke

the fourth wall by gazing directly towards the camera, and thus the audience, to create a sense of unease and threat.

Through the use of both audio and visual traditions such as narration, dialogue, black and white still images, zoom, and particular gazes, frames, and angles, *Deadly Women* constructs convincing albeit stereotypical narratives about women who kill. Many of these narratives evoke common gendered stereotypes and cultural tropes that are familiar in mass mediated content and that fail to adequately consider the mitigating life circumstances that influence women's use of violence. These stereotypes, especially as they are reified as 'truthful' in the infotainment genre, have implications for criminalized women such that they encourage women to be punished to the full extent of the law. Indeed, *Deadly Women's* narratives individualize and pathologize women's violence with little consideration for the cultural, societal, and structural constraints that are implicated in women's acts of violence. This chapter explored some of the most prevalent themes found within the data. The following conclusion chapter attempts to connect various analytic and theoretical threads and aims to bring to light research questions that remain to be answered.

CONCLUSION

Although I tried to avoid fitting the data into previously identified themes such as the mad/bad/sad trichotomy, in the end the findings did reflect this. As such, it is clear that new media is not creating new ways of (re)presenting criminalized women, rather they are relying on age-old cultural tropes and stereotypes. These understandings of violent women are not only dated but are also inherently sexist as they reflect patriarchal manners of thinking that police gender, particularly that of women and girls. Of note is that these stereotypes function to pathologize womanhood and girlhood – not solely criminalized women – since it endorses the belief that something is ‘wrong’ with women and girls who commit crime (thus, by extension, something is ‘right’ with women and girls who do not commit crime). The same views are not held for male violence, rather when men and boys commit crime it is often at least somewhat accepted and expected (e.g.: ‘boys will be boys’ mentality). Not surprisingly, these sexist stereotypes are rooted in a patriarchal world that privileges masculinity and passes on male oriented knowledge as gender-neutral, objective, and truthful. These dominant knowledge frames then permeate society and seemingly justify class and world-making power – that is, power over words that simultaneously brings together and divides various groups of people. In the first section of the conclusion, I expand on the theoretical implications that I began to tease apart in the analysis chapter. Next, I outline some of the limitations to this research. Finally, I briefly discuss some potential areas for future research.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

One of the greatest problems with infotainment is that it is essentially a fictional genre that is (re)presented as primarily fact-based and thus ‘truthful’ (Kohm, 2009; Peelo, 2005). It is especially within the media genre of infotainment that facts, knowledge, and information become

indistinguishable (Ericson et al., 1991; Kohm, 2009). The specific aspects of infotainment – verbal narratives of ‘facts’, information framing, and entertainment value, in addition to discursive visuals, such as re-enactments – combine and function to encourage uncritical thinking and acceptance of ideological messages. This format lends itself to creating a soap opera of violence in which cases are hyper-sensationalized and reduced to the assumptions, beliefs, and values of ‘experts’ and television producers. The expert speakers and narrator combined with the visual aspects of fact-making, help to create seemingly ‘truthful’ accounts of women who kill. Visual aspects (using credible sources and photographic/film conventions) and auditory aspects (dialogue and narration) – of fact-making both rely on consumer cultural literacy (i.e.: the ability for the audience to draw on previous life experiences, such as heuristics and stereotypes, in order to make sense of the subject matter) and are perceived as neutral and reliable since they are familiar and easy to understand. Thus, visual and verbal discourses work together to frame a story from a particular perspective that is perceived as truthful.

In this way, infotainment encourages the (re)construction of cultural tropes. This leads to what Bourdieu (1989) refers to as a ‘theory effect’ since stereotypes have an air of reality that impose divisions between individuals and groups – thus they have class and world-making power. As such, the complex interactions between media, truth, science, categories, and stereotypes come to the forefront of the implications of an infotainment series such as *Deadly Women*. Indeed, *Deadly Women* aids in the maintenance and (re)construction of stereotypical beliefs about women who kill; at the same time, drawing from popular knowledge and culturally accepted and embedded notions of gender and violence awards an air of credibility to the series. The problem of perception stems from the very fact that categorizations are perceived as logical – as such, categorizations and stereotypes are dominant knowledge sets that mask the influence

of underlying social structures while simultaneously subjugating alternative knowledge frames (Bourdieu, 1989).

Deadly Women created very particular overarching narratives of women who kill. Although there were two distinct trajectories (emotionless and emotional), these trajectories were connected by general discussions of and references to emotionality and more serious mental health issues. As such, women's and girls' violence was portrayed as always stemming from their emotionality and sometimes also from accompanying mental health issues. Because these simplistic trajectories are (re)presented as credible characterizations, they can have real and problematic implications for criminalized women, for example, in the rehabilitation expectations of the correctional system. To be clear, I am not suggesting that the correctional system designs its programs in light of how this show characterizes women who commit acts of violence, but rather that the show's reliance on longstanding gendered cultural stereotypes about women are mirrored in correctional efforts. By distinguishing between good (non-dangerous) women, and bad and mad/sad women whom are dangerous, *Deadly Women* invokes common stereotypes that are present in the discourses found in other media genres as well as in state and carceral institutions that narrate how women are expected to feel and behave.

For instance, once women enter the carceral institution, many of them are prescribed a variety of psychotropic medications prior to any mental health assessment – they are assumed to require psychiatric treatments simply because they are imprisoned (Kilty, 2012). Indeed, no mediated image or discourse is neutral; rather particular storylines are emphasized at the expense of others, which, in the context of this research, ultimately functions to uphold a neo-conservative agenda – namely that carceral institutions are required to 'fix' the problem of women's and girls' violence, often through psychiatric means. If the psy sciences are not able to

rid women and girls of their violent tendencies, they are deemed unmanageable ‘high risk’ subjects who must remain incarcerated in order to maintain public safety.

It is the ‘bad’ women (those who follow the emotionless trajectory) that are deemed most dangerous because they are not believed to be amendable to treatment; whereas the mad/sad women (those who follow the emotional trajectory) might still be deemed dangerous when and if they do not follow the prescribed treatment options as outlined by the carceral (and affiliated) institutions – thus emotional women are believed to be ‘treatable’. This dichotomy is reflected in Donohue and Moore’s (2009) discussion of ‘offenders’ – those who are beyond help – versus ‘clients’ – those who can be helped. This mentality upholds the psy-carceral complex (Kilty, 2014) as criminalized women are held individually responsible for their criminal actions as well as for their ‘recovery’ processes. Ironically, although individual responsibility is explicitly expected and encouraged from these women, they are also implicitly expected to remain dependent, vulnerable, and even pathological; for instance, by not developing sustainable and transferable (employment) skills within the carceral institution and by internalizing the “criminal personality script” that corrections proffers as an explanatory frame for women’s faulty thinking and criminality (Donohue & Moore, 2009; Kilty, 2014; Pollack, 2006, p. 243). State reliance on pathologization discourses to explain women’s criminality and in which considerations of the effects of socio-structural marginality are absent, ensures that medicalized psy treatments continue. Thus, a self-fulfilling prophecy exists in which criminalized women are constructed as pathological victims who lack agency and require professional intervention in order to function properly within the (gendered) confines of social behavioural expectations.

Another implication of distinguishing between bad and mad/sad women is related to the policing of gender and its associated behavioural expectations. The result of this type of policing

is that those who do *not* conform to feminine role expectations (e.g.: emotionless women) are more likely to be (kept) incarcerated, while those who *do* conform to feminine role expectations (e.g.: emotional women) may be more likely to earn parole release for ‘good behaviour’.

Ironically, good behaviour in prison and/or psychiatric institutions is linked to whether or not the individual follows their medication orders (Kilty, 2012). As such, medication orders can also be described as ‘gender orders’ that force ‘clients’ into feminine roles by prescribing the expected ‘good’ behaviour (e.g.: taking one’s medications, participating in treatment programs, outwardly expressing one’s ‘appropriate’ feelings such as sadness and depression, while keeping ‘inappropriate’ feelings such as anger in check). While men are also policed in terms of gender, it is not to the same extent as women; and the expectations of each gender are qualitatively different.

Interestingly, gender policing and accompanying gender orders encourage criminalized women to internalize and adopt hegemonic notions of femininity, which are quite narrow in scope. Ironically, it is not only criminalized women that are dually constructed within the series; *Deadly Women* implicitly identifies what is expected of ‘good women’ more generally. For instance, good (non-criminalized) women are expected to be emotional, but not overly emotional; in control of their behaviour while also allowing themselves to be controlled by others (e.g.: males); individually responsible and independent yet also somewhat dependent (on men); relationship oriented, but in the ‘right’ way such that family (e.g.: children) does not come at the expense of romantic relationships (e.g.: husbands/partners), which positions motherhood as the defining role in a woman’s life; and charming but not using this charm for personal gain. In this way, women and girls are not expected or permitted to use their strengths to their advantage; rather, they are expected to play up their weaknesses in order to appear vulnerable and

dependent. These dualisms and idealized notions of hegemonic femininity and the ‘good woman’ position overly strong women (e.g.: the emotionless) and overly weak women (e.g.: the emotional) as dangerous because they committed acts of violence that ‘good women’ do not commit.

This view does little to advance a deeper understanding of women and girls’ pathways to violence and contributes to what Bourdieu (1989) refers to as the ‘theory effect’ in which individuals who are assumed to be alike are grouped together. This allows for groups such as criminalized women to be perceived as inherently different from non-criminalized women. Comack (2006) echoes this argument by pointing out that the majority of the time it is the differences rather than the similarities between criminalized and non-criminalized women that are focused on, both within research and in the media. As such, binary thinking that opposes rather than unites groups of women can lead to increased fear of and unfamiliarity with individuals outside of one’s own group – leading to a routine lack of understanding of those perceived as Other (Bourdieu, 1989; Smart, 1990).

LIMITATIONS

This research has several limitations. It is of note that this thesis is the product of a two-year study. With more time, I may have been able to reduce the number and scope of the limitations. The first limitation is that I selectively, rather than completely, transcribed the audio data. This has two related problems: first, what I initially deemed important determined the content of the audio data that I transcribed (and what I deemed important may have changed as a result of gaining experience with the data, initial themes, and coding – thus potentially creating inconsistencies during data collection); and second, I did not transcribe the audio data of the re-enactment scenes because I wanted to focus on how the ‘experts’ constructed the women. In

order to minimize the effects of this limitation, the audio data was transcribed over two separate periods of time in order to ensure that the initial transcription was correct (i.e.: verbatim) and to ensure that any audio data that was initially excluded from transcription was considered for transcription a second time.

The second major limitation to this research is that the data consists of both audio and visual content; although I could rather easily account for the audio portion of the data by transcribing it verbatim, I could not as easily account for the visual portion of the data. This is a limitation identified by Lister and Wells (2001) who argue that “it can be very difficult to spell out the meanings of pictures in verbal or written language, which after all is another code. Some kind of translation is bound to take place either way but in this case from image to word... Language can never get on a level with images” (p. 76). One way that I tried to minimize this limitation was by creating and using visual stills from *Deadly Women* in order to get readers closer to the data so that they could participate in the interpretative process. However, still images create additional limitations since they “can take on a significance quite removed from the context from which the image was taken”; and they can also be “selected to foreground certain values, meanings and ‘preferred readings’” (Spencer, 2011, p. 137).

A third limitation to this research is that I did not code for sounds other than speech, such as music, background noises, and sound effects. Some research identifies sound(s) as extremely important to (audio)visual productions (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004), but with the two year time constraint and limited space in the final manuscript, I would not have been able to provide an adequately in depth analysis of these aspects of the sound component of *Deadly Women*.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this research explored an array of issues with different theoretical implications, there are still questions to be addressed in future research. For instance, the personal accounts of criminalized women themselves were notably absent from *Deadly Women* and represent a significant aspect of subjugated knowledge that could greatly benefit our understanding of women and girls' experiences of violence. Bringing these experiences to the forefront of research could be accomplished by forming relationships with criminalized women and girls in prison and/or in the community (those on parole or probation). A unique aspect of future research could be using these personal narratives in order to create a media presentation such as a short film or YouTube clip in order to publically (re)present these marginalized perspectives. Whether criminalized women and girls made the media presentation or worked with researchers and filmmakers to create a collaborative production, it is important to include an insider's perspective in media content. This kind of innovative research is becoming increasingly common, given the rise of collaborative and created methodological approaches that encourage research participants to actively create and interpret data, for example by taking photographs or making collages. Regardless of how these narratives are formulated within or outside of media, the key thing is that they are at the centre of rather than at the margins of the research enterprise.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis explored dominant knowledge frames and mediated images that were (re)presented as 'truths' in the infotainment series *Deadly Women*. The purpose of this research was to identify how the series portrayed women who commit serious violent crime, as well as how hegemonic femininity was (re)constructed, what narratives of gender and violence were emphasized, and how (audio)visual conventions impacted these (re)presentations. As we receive

messages through popular discourses and mediated images, it is important to push back against these dominant knowledge claims in order to expose their underlying socio-political, historical, and institutionalized meanings. In part, this can be accomplished by remaining critical, asking questions, talking to one another, sharing knowledge, and challenging stereotypes.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ATTRIBUTE CODING

Episode/Segment/#:

Name of Offender:

Offender Age:

Offender Race (Mention of Race; Mention of Religion):

Offender Education:

Offender Employment:

Offender History:

Type of Violence (Weapons; No Weapons; Repeated; One time):

Primary Motive:

Offender Relationship to Victim:

Number of Victims (Attempted; fatality):

Name of Victim(s) (Attempted; fatality):

Victim Age:

Victim Race:

Victim Education:

Victim Employment:

Victim History:

Characters' Names:

Characters' Employment/Relevance:

Characters' Background:

Characters' Props (If Significant – Clothing/jewelry; hairstyle; makeup):

APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTIVE AND LITERAL CODING

Social role (other than mother and wife/partner)

Motherhood

Romantic relationships

Sexuality

Physical appearance

Biology (mental health; intellect and skills)

Individual biography (employment; education; history – family; abuse; trauma)

Emotion (not related to mental health)

Motive

APPENDIX 3: TREE MAPPING

1. Social role

1A. Internal character/Personality

1A1. Deceitful

1A2. Immature

1A4. Subservient/passive

1A5. Greedy/entitled

1A6. Good

1A7. Manipulation

1A7.a. Easily manipulated

1A7.b. Manipulating

1A7.b.a. Charming

1A7.b.b. Multiple personalities

1B. External actions

1B1. Party girl

1B2. Out of control

1B4. Rule breaker

1B4.a. Criminal

1B4.b. Customs/roles/expectations

1B4.c. Threatening/dangerous

1B5. Physical appearance

1B5.a. Childlike/youthful

1B5.b. Gothic

2. Motherhood

2A. Good mother

2A1. Expectations of mother's role

2A1.a. Puts children first

2A1.b. Nurturing

2A1.c. Protects children

2A1.d. Provides for children

2A2. Appropriately emotional

2A2.a. Loving/warm

2A2.b. Concerned for children's wellbeing

2B. Bad mother

2B1. Lacks maternal instinct

2B2. Doesn't put children first

2B3. Emotionless

3. Romantic relationships

3A. Partner at center of universe/obsessed

3B. Young love

3B1. Girl's family disapproves of her partner

3B2. Inexperienced

3B3. Bad choices of partner(s)

3C. Wife/girlfriend

3C1. Attention-seeking

3C2. Rejection

3D. Marriage/relationship context

3D1. Happy

3D2. Miserable/abusive

3D3. Woman is out of partner's control

3D4. Woman is dominant over partner

3D5. Quick marriage

4. Sexuality

4A. Sexual identity

4B. Immoral

4C. Overly sexual/'addicted' to sex

5. Individual biography

5A. Abuse/neglect

5A1. Past

5A2. Present

5B. Trauma

5C. Addiction

5C1. Others

5C2. Personal

5D. Home life/family

5D1. Past

5D1.a. Positive experiences

5D1.b. Negative experiences

5D2. Present

5D2.a. Positive experiences

5D2.b. Negative experiences

5E. Criminal history

5F. SES

5F1. Education

5F2. Employment

6. Biology

6A. Mental health/illness

6A1. Biologically/genetically based

6A2. Mental illness as significant impairment/extremely harmful

6A3. Psychiatric help

6A3.a. Professionals/clinicians

6A3.b. Medications

6A4. Diagnosis

6A5. Self-harm/suicidal

6B. Intellect/skills

6B1. Intelligent/skilled

6B2. Unintelligent/unskilled

7. Emotions

7A. Emotional

7A1. Fragile/overly emotional/overwhelmed

7A2. Helplessness

7A3. Fear

7A4. (Forbidden/romantic) love

7A5. Hate

7A6. Anger

7A7. Power/control

7A8. Thrill/rush/excitement

7A9. Unhappy

7B. Emotionless

8. Motive

8A. Mental illness

8A1. Inability to rationalize/think 'properly'

8A2. No medical/psychiatric treatment

8A3. Diagnosis/use of diagnostic terms or buzz words

8B. Emotion (other than mental illness)

8B1. Love

8B1.a. Forbidden love

8B1.b. Anything for love

8B1.c. Jealousy

8B2. Hate

8B3. Anger

8B4. Revenge

8B5. Fear

8B6. Overwhelmed/breaking point/stress

8B7. Desire to kill/thrill killing

8C. Selfish/greedy

8C1. Romance over everything

8C2. Financial and material gain

8D. Protection

8D1. Self-defence (by proxy)

8D2. Of self (cover up/lies/crimes)

8E. Manipulated

APPENDIX 4: THE *DEADLY WOMEN* AND THEIR CRIMES

Mothers

Diane Downs; 2,2,1¹²; “Fatal Attractions”; Murdered one of her children and attempted to murder two of her other children

Stacy Barker; 6,12,1; “Bury Their Babies”; Murdered her infant child

Kelly Silk; 6,12,2; “Bury Their Babies”; Murdered two of her children and attempted to murder two of her other children; murdered her husband

Christina Riggs; 2,3,2; “Twisted Minds”; Murdered her two children

Profit Killers

Barbara Stager; 4,3,3; “Fortune Hunters”; Murdered her husband and suspected of murdering another husband

Annie Monahan; 8,5,2; “Catch Me If You Can”; Murdered three of her husbands and her niece

Melissa Sheppard; 8,11,1; “For The Money Honey”; Murdered three of her husbands

Jane Dorotik; 5,5,2; “To Love and to Kill”; Murdered her husband

Youth

J.R.; 3,5,1; “Forbidden Love”; Murdered her parents and her 8-year-old brother with her boyfriend

Nicole Kasinskas; 4,13,1; “A Daughter’s Revenge”; Murdered her mother with her boyfriend

Alyssa Bustmante; 6,8,2; “No Good Reason”; Murdered her 9-year-old neighbour

Sharon Carr; 8,3,2; “Never Too Young”; Murdered an 18-year-old stranger

¹² These numbers represent the season, episode, and segment of the episode, followed by the title of the episode.

Vigilantes

Aileen Wuornos; 2,6,1; "Predators"; Murdered 6 men who solicited her for sex work

Belinda Van Krevel; 4,13,3; "A Daughter's Revenge"; Hired a friend to murder her father

Anna Antonio; 8,7,3; "Self-Made Widows"; Hired two men to murder her husband

Amber Cummings; 5,7,1; "Breaking Point"; Murdered her husband

APPENDIX 5: MATRIX DISPLAY OF CASES WITH TRAJECTORIES AND RELATED VARIABLES

Typology	Emotionless (1)	Selfish	Manipulative	Sexual	In Control	Mental Health (1)	Emotional (2)	Love	Trauma	Stress	Out of Control	Mental Health (2)
<u>Mother</u> Diane Downs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sociopath	(Yes)	(Yes)	No (?)	No	(Yes)	No
<u>Mother</u> Stacey Barker	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sociopath	(Yes)	(Yes)	No	No	(Yes)	No
<u>Mother</u> Christina Riggs	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Sexual abuse	Yes	Yes	Depression
<u>Mother</u> Kelly Silk	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Mother's suicide	Yes	Yes	Postpartum depression
<u>Profit</u> Barbara Stager	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	(Yes)	Anxiety disorder
<u>Profit</u> Jane Dorotik	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	(Yes)	No	No	No	(Yes)	No
<u>Profit</u> Annie Monahan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No (?)	No	No	No	No	No
<u>Profit</u> Melissa Sheppard	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Psychopath	No	No	One incident of domestic violence	No	No	No

Typology	Emotionless (1)	Selfish	Manipulative	Sexual	In Control	Mental Health (1)	Emotional (2)	Love	Trauma	Stress	Out of Control	Mental Health (2)
<u>Girl</u> J.R.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	(Yes)	No
<u>Girl</u> Nicole Kasinskas	No (?)	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
<u>Girl</u> Alyssa Bustamante	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Antisocial personality disorder	(Yes)	No	Parental drug & alcohol addiction	No	(Yes)	Depression, self-harm, suicide attempt
<u>Girl</u> Sharon Carr	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	(Yes)	No	Witness of domestic violence, foster care	No	(Yes)	Schizoaffective disorder
<u>Vigilante</u> Aileen Wuornos	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Parental abandonment, sexual abuse, homelessness	Yes	Yes	No
<u>Vigilante</u> Belinda Van Krevel	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Sexual & physical abuse	No	No	No
<u>Vigilante</u> Amber Cummings	No	No	No	No	(Yes)	No	Yes	No	Sexual, & physical, & emotional abuse	Yes	Yes	No
<u>Vigilante</u> Anna Antonio	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Sexual, & physical, & emotional abuse	Yes	(Yes)	No