She Just Snapped! Rethinking mad, sad and bad discourses of women who kill

By

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Dedication

For Evelyn Louise Winder-Lightbourne, *Mom*, my grandmother. If there is any good in me it can be traced back to you.

Kirtland G. Hutcheson, *Dad*, always in my heart. Happy Birthday in heaven!

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Abstract

Women do not fit nicely into the category of violent offenders. Using Oxygen Network's flagship franchise series *Snapped*, I present a historical study of the first season of the show that marks an important moment in criminological and True Crime TV history as it relates to the conceptualisation of women who kill. I set out to answer the question "How does *Snapped* challenge or reaffirm the dominant theories of women who kill?" I argue that there is an alternative way to explain female killers other than the pejorative mainstream discourses of mad, sad and bad. I use a thematic analysis to unravel themes and draw on Chris Weedon's feminist post structuralism with specific focus on discourse and power as they relate to gender and agency. My findings reveal that women who kill are not sad, but they can be however mad, bad, and do possess agency.

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Chapter One

Contextualising My Research

Introduction

Women do not fit nicely into the category of violent offender. Societal norms tend to dictate that women are caring and nurturing, with violence and aggression[1] being traits set aside for men (Arrigo & Griffin, 2004; Wesley, 2006). The existence of infamous female killers, from Betty Broderick to Jodi Arias, suggests that women committing murders is nothing new[2]; and yet, when women kill, they are still seen to have transgressed the gendered discourse of "maternity, piety, and weakness" (Newburn, 2007, p. 302). Further, because traditional criminologists did not attempt to reconcile violence with femininity, normatively gendered theoretical frameworks of crime and criminality were the only ones which developed. Within this thesis a normative framework of femininity (i.e. the association of particular traits and behaviours with female-identified persons), will be used to describe the dominant way in which women who kill are conceptualised in medicine, the criminal justice system, and popular culture (Africa 2010; Chan 2005; Morissey 2003). I will show that women who kill are constructed as mad (pathological), sad (victim) or bad (deviant) (Africa, 2010, p.80).

[1] Aggression is any behaviour directed toward another person (or person's property) with the intent to do harm even if the aggressor was unsuccessful (White & Kowalski, 1994, p. 488).

[2] Former Socialite Elisabeth "Betty" Broderick and mother of four shot to death her ex-husband Dan and his new wife Linda in the couple's bedroom in November 1989 in San Diego. After a second trial she was convicted of two counts of second-degree murder and sentenced to 32 years. There have been two television movies and several books about the case (Halkias, 2009). Jodi Arias' trial became a global circus (Lohr, 2011). She was convicted in May 2013 of first-degree murder of her ex-boyfriend Travis Alexander. Alexander was murdered at his home in Arizona on June 8, 2008. He was found in his shower with multiple stab wounds, a slit throat and single gunshot to the head. Arias was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole (Keneally, 2015).

According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics (2011) between 1980 and 2008 some 67.8% of homicides account for men killing men; 9% accounts for women killing men; 21% accounts for men killing women; 2.2% accounts for women killing women. Based on these numbers it is evident that women commit substantially fewer murders than men. However, some women do kill, and despite the statistical evidence of this, there is a reluctance in Western culture to accept that it is true (Chan, 2005; Morrissey, 2003), primarily because women are not considered violent or aggressive (Daly and Maher, 1998; Shiers, 2009; Simon and Ahn-Redding, 2005). Studies show that when women kill, they kill persons close to them such as intimate partners and their deadly reactive action is in self-defence or to protect their children from harm (Brookman, 2005; Sabri et al, 2016; Titterington & Subjack, 2012). Research also suggests that women who kill are also more likely to use methods of poisoning (Walker & Gill, 2019).

The television show *Snapped* (2004–present) provides weekly stories of women who kill and who are not exclusively victims, bringing into question traditional ways of conceptualising femininity. *Snapped* is an American show broadcast on the Oxygen television network which is owned by NBC Universal. This real crime show depicts women who murder or maim—most often their spouses and partners. While the motives for murder explored on the show are wide and varied, the implied explanation evident from the title is that the accused lost her grasp on reality and "snapped." *Snapped* is broadcast in 30-minute segments and chronicles sensational and real violent crimes committed by women.

Each episode of *Snapped* showcases a woman's life prior to her "snapping" and the consequences that follow from it. The episodes begin with a female narrator who provides a history of the perpetrator from childhood up to the commission of the crime. The voiceover is interspersed with photographs of the victims and killers, video footage of the trial proceedings,

interviews with family members, friends, police, lawyers, clinical psychologists and, in many of the episodes, the subject herself is interviewed to complete the narrative. The show then transitions into the trial phase where a decision is made about whether or not the woman "snapped." Where cameras are allowed in the courtrooms, actual video footage of the trials are shown, mostly testimony given by the accused women, including verdict segments which are narrated.

Anne Kingston, in her article "They're women who shop at Wal-Mart and watch 'Oprah'--until one day...," attributes the uncommon popularity of women who kill to the difficulty many people have of picturing women in homicidal roles. She explains:

> *Snapped's* very existence is testament to the fact women who kill remain cultural novelties. It's difficult to imagine a prime-time programme profiling men who shoot, stab, poison and otherwise eviscerate their mates not eliciting outrage. But female murderers have long been regarded as more entertaining fodder. Either they're viewed as aberrant, like Wuornos, or fetishized as cult figures warranting 'you go girl' admonitions, like the two central characters in Thelma and Louise (2008, p. 71).

Kingston adds that the women profiled on *Snapped* are people the viewing audience can relate to, at least, that is, until they commit murder. My research aligns with Kingston's analysis that women who kill are novel and a rare occurrence. My examination of the mad discourse of women who kill also aligns with Kingston's analysis in terms of the degree to which ordinary women "snap" or lose control. Notwithstanding these similar points of alignment, my study provides another argument: that women who kill do not always adhere to, nor can they be

conceptualised in relation to, traditional mad, sad or bad discourses, long used to explain women's commission of murder.

The pulse of *Snapped* is women who kill, and its authority appears to rest in bringing real stories of women who kill to TV screens, its emphasis on all stages of crime and prosecution (arrest, trial, punishment and/or acquittal), and the added bonus of seeing the accused, and hearing her directly comment on the murder she committed.

This research examines the dominant theories found in the literature regarding women who kill. These normative frameworks include entrenched beliefs—found in criminology as elsewhere—about women's capacity to criminally and violently offend (Chan, 2005, p.160). In other words, women are only seen as able to offend when their violence is precipitated by violence, when they are mentally unstable, or if they wilfully defy societal norms. The theory that women commit murder because they are psychologically unstable may align with the idea of "snapping"; that is what I am going to determine in my reading of the series. That is, I want to know if the series, *Snapped* ultimately challenges or reaffirms dominant theories of women who kill?

As this project is centered on gender and criminality, precisely women who kill, this study is undergirded by feminist criminology. Feminist criminology is concerned with the relationship between gendered experiences of women and the crimes perpetrated by them. This thesis pursues this research by drawing specifically on Chris Weedon's (1987) work on feminist post structuralism and takes into account the concepts of discourse and power as they relate to gender and agency. This framework allows for the examination of traditional discourses surrounding gender in criminology, and better understanding of how women who kill are conceptualised.

To explore my research question, I study the first season of *Snapped* which was watching 13 episodes or viewing 351 minutes of footage in separate intervals. I utilise qualitative content analysis focusing on a thematic analysis to conduct my research. I chose this method because it is advantageous in the systematic identification of patterns and themes (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). My aim is to determine if the storylines on *Snapped* are representative of mainstream criminological discourses of women who kill being mad, sad, or bad. I will also be investigating whether the series suggests the women acted with agency, which would challenge the idea of "snapping" and provide an alternative explanation for lethal female violence.

Importance of Research

Women who kill hold a particular allure as their violent actions confound and challenge conceptualisations of normative femininity which posits women as "self-sacrificing, passive and nurturing" (Jones 2003, p. x). But, in reality, male violence dominates, whereas female lethal violence is rare (Pelvin, 2019). In 2019, women in the United States accounted for 8.7 % or 1,408 murders compared to males accounting for 63.6 % or 10,335 murders according to the Uniform Crime Report statistics of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.[3] Naffine (1997) contends that maleness and violence is a natural phenomenon. There is a preponderance of research that focuses on male violence with the common practice of generalising male theory to female offending. This thesis therefore contributes to feminist criminological inquiry into female offending and adds to the limited but growing body of work on female lethal violence (Comack & Brickley, 2007; Mantymaki, 2013; Morissey, 2003; Pelvin, 2019; Potts & Weare, 2018; Seal,

[3] The gender of 27.7 percent or 4,502 perpetrators of homicides were reported in the UCR as unknown.

2010). Moreover, my findings both affirm and depart from the traditional discourses of women who kill being mad (mentally disturbed); sad (victimised); or bad (deviant) and adds further detail in understanding women who kill.

Outline of Thesis

Chapter Two provides a review of literature on violent women and women who kill. It demonstrates that women who kill are posited outside a normative framework or traditional female characteristics such as passivity and gentleness. Instead, the dominant criminological discourses construct women who kill as either mad (pathological), sad (victimised), and/or bad (deviant). A brief history of television, including the crime genre is also offered.

Chapter Three explores the theoretical framework that guides this thesis. I provide the theoretical orientation which includes a brief history of feminism and feminist criminology, which has created a foundation for this project. Focusing on Chris Weedon's definition of post structuralism, I examine how the concepts of discourse and power relate to gender and agency and their usefulness in the project undertaken here.

Chapter Four discusses the method used in my thesis. I highlight why I chose my data set being the first season of *Snapped.* I explain my qualitative method which is content analysis with a focus on thematic analysis to study episodes in the series. I explain the procedure used to collect the data and I also address the potential limitations of the methods used.

In Chapter Five a synopsis of the 13 episodes in Season One of *Snapped* is given as an easy referral guide to the storylines of murderous women discussed in Chapter Six. In Chapter Six an analysis of discursive findings is applied to the theoretical framework to draw conclusions on the dominant criminological discourses of women who kill being mad, sad, and bad.

Chapter Seven revisits my research question that underpinned this thesis. I examine the findings to bring an understanding of female lethal violence. Finally, in Chapter Eight, I provide a conclusion to the project highlighting how it contributes to the field of criminology and conceptualisation of women who kill.

The Research and Researcher

For as long as I can remember I have had a fascination with murder mysteries which I locate to weekly childhood viewing of *Murder She Wrote*[4] with my grandmother. Our nightly line-up always included ABC News with Peter Jennings, local news and a television show before bedtime. As I grew older my must-see television viewing incorporated protagonist female detectives in *Rizzoli & Isles*; *Law & Order SUV*; and regular true crime viewing of *Dateline*, *48 Hours*, and of course ABC Evening News. It came as no surprise studying journalism at a Community College and then at university, majoring in Mass Communication with a minor in Criminology. So as a graduate student at SMU majoring in Criminology I was faced with the dichotomy of decision in choosing what research topic to study. I am a bit embarrassed to say that it took me two topic changes complete with literature reviews to finally realise I could meld

[4] I became a fan of Murder She Wrote during childhood and this love for the show continues as I have watched every episode and continue to re-watch on the channel, MeTV (Memorable Television), on cable.

my love of real-life mysteries and television. I therefore chose to undertake a historical study of the women who kill in Season 1 of *Snapped,* based on my criminological research and social background. Specifically: I am a woman; I am engaged in a M.A. thesis in Criminology, have a minor in Criminology and am a former journalist with a niche in crime reporting. I have spent considerable time in morgues and embalming rooms because of my family's funeral business and I am the daughter of former and retired police officers.

I began this project being fully aware of my inherent biases based on the nature of my background that I would have to quell. What I did not anticipate at the start, was the multiple challenges that I would have had to face including a long lag time, literally years, between my first draft and finally getting here for completion of this final draft. This project is therefore a labour of love that helped me to combine criminological studies and television.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Historically Situating this Study

The emergence of crime in mass communication coincided with the expansion of the printing press in the 19th century, which coincided with increased literacy among the proletariat (Brown, 2003). As literacy rates climbed among the working classes, their desire to absorb news about their communities increased the circulation of newspapers. Brown notes that these newspapers cashed in by simultaneously selling fear of crime and denouncing the existence of crime (p. 26). During this era of "cultural modernisation," new forms of popular entertainment and communication were generated. Brown explains that the media cemented its relationship with the public in two ways: by becoming precursor to tabloid journalism by offering "shock horror" stories for mass consumption, "and by creating a forum for "debate, propaganda and lament" (pp. 25 – 26).

Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966), about the 1959 murder of the Clutter family in Kansas, is often considered a the turning point in the development of the true crime genre (Browden, 2010; Murley 2009; Schmid, 2010). It was not until the 1980s, however, that the American true crime genre came into its own, with the production of reality-based crime solving series *Unsolved Mysteries* in 1987 (Quill, 1990). Occurring in the year 2000 was the debut of Oxygen an American cable and satellite network with a number of notable founders, including Oprah Winfrey (Carter, 2009). Oxygen began with a line-up that included *Oprah's After The Show* and *Talk Sex with Susan Johanson* and a number of reality shows. The network was designed to specifically target a female audience through original programming. One such

programme which had its first airing in 2004 was *Snapped* which broadcasts the lives of seemingly ordinary women who kill. *Snapped* which is Oxygen's flagship franchise (NBC Universal, 2018), is also the network's longest running show and the subject of this thesis. Toward this end, I have intentionally studied only the first season of *Snapped.* This marks an important moment in criminological TV history as it relates to the conceptualisation of women who kill.

As the show *Snapped* focuses on women who kill, my literature review focuses on studies related to women and murder. As this is a historical study dating back 17 years to the debut of the first season of *Snapped* the literature that I examine also corresponds to this period. I also look at literature on the medium of television as *Snapped* is a television series. I have divided my literature review into the following themes: theories of aggression and violence, women who kill, "snapping" and agency, reality crime shows and true crime genre. First, it is necessary to analyse research on aggression and violence which leads to homicides and to also analyse what factors are given for why murder happens. Second, it is important to analyse how female killers are constructed in order to deconstruct the ways in which "abnormal" female behaviour is represented in the first season of *Snapped*. Third, looking at how the show as an example of true crime is influenced by the sensationalism of RTV will help situate its representations of women who kill.

Early Literature on Aggression and Violence

> Women are not typically thought of as natural born killers. When we think of killing, our minds flick more readily to images of men: men as hunters, soldiers, terrorists, serial killers and wife murderers. If we do consider women killing, we assume it was accidental, or carried out in self-defence, or hormonally induced.

> The idea that a sane, rational woman could intentionally take the life of another human being seems repugnant, unnatural, and unthinkable. Women's bodies bear life; their nature is to nurture not annihilate. (Jordan 1998, p. 96)

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, homicide is characterised as "the wilful (non-negligent) killing of one human being by another" (Uniform Crime Reports, 2010) and is recognised by theorists as being primarily perpetrated by men (Arrigo & Griffin, 2004; Flowers, 2003; Jordan, 1998; Wesley, 2006). Theories of homicide are influenced by theories of aggression and violence (Brookman, 2005; Flowers, 2003). The presumption that men are aggressive, and women are not, underpins most of these theories, which makes theories of violence and aggression necessary to an exploration of women who kill. Episodes of female violence have resulted in multiple studies (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Motz, 2008; Swan & Snow, 2003). If the presumption that women are innately non-violent is accepted as fact, then apart from reactionary violence, the dominant theories of women being passive would be taken as "true" or "factual."

More recent literature during the early 2000s has focused on women's aggression and violence (Miller & Meloy, 2006; Motz, 2008; Swan & Snow, 2003). An increase in arrests for women committing violent acts and the media's attention on these crimes seems to have brought interest and attention to the violent female criminal (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006). Consequently, some feminist scholars have sought to expand the literature on aggression and violence by asking whether female offenders acted with agency or if their actions were a result of their "gendered lives" (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006). A woman's gendered life here refers to intersecting systems of marginalisation and oppression (e.g. gender, race, class (Simpson et al. 2008) that may account for her offences (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006, p. 345). For example, Wesley (2006) used this intersectional approach to study the lived

experiences of homeless women and exotic dancers to see if being victims of violence could account for them becoming perpetrators of violence. Wesley conducted in-depth interviews with 40 women, African American, Hispanic, and white women. She noted that while women in the two groups were different, they were collectively "multiply marginalised, constructed as 'deviant' and excluded from various aspects of mainstream society" (p. 304). She found that cumulative victimisation, dysfunction in the family, and poverty, had resulted in the experience of homelessness or choice to become exotic dancers. Wesley also found that women's violence such as beating, punching, and stabbing, served as coping strategies for homeless women against victimisation by their partners and for the exotic dancers as resistance to victimisation from clientele (p.324).

Aggression denotes any behaviour intended to harm another person who does not want to be harmed[5]. Criminologist Rachael Collins defines violence as aggression with the goal of extreme physical harm, such as injury or death. According to the American Psychological Association's website, violence is an extreme form of aggression, and includes assault, rape, and murder. While some persons may use aggression and violence interchangeably, they constitute different acts. Dr. Collins explains that if one young person spreads a rumour about a peer, this is an act of aggression but does not constitute violence. On the other hand, if a young person, kicks, shoots, or stab his or her peer, the young person is committing an act of violence. Thus, all violent acts are aggressive, but not all aggressive acts are violent— only those designed to cause extreme physical harm are violent," she said. Most research into aggression and violence has focused on men as perpetrators and women as victims, in part because women are considered non-aggressive (Putallaz & Bierman, 2004, pp. 24-25). Putallaz and Bierman suggest that the reason studies on aggression and violence have neglected women is because, historically, women

[5] R. Collins, personal communication, June 3, 2021.

have rarely been arrested for acts of aggression or violence and were thus perceived as a low threat, which led to their neglect in criminological research (p. 25). Flowers (2003) contends that theories of masculinity focus on the commission of acts of violence because this reflects "masculine values, gender, nature, socialization, physical superiority to be more powerful, violent, aggressive and controlling" (p. 77). A theory introduced by James Messerschmidt in 1993 hypothesised that criminal behaviour is an "acceptable" outlet for men when they cannot fulfill their role of dominance and control in any other way (Hood-Williams, 2001; Krienert, 2003). The historical presumption, in theories of masculinity, is that masculinity is singular/homogenous, that dominance and control are normative traits in men, and that since men are responsible for a majority of serious crimes, crime is a male activity (Flowers, 2003, p.32) which suggests that only men are worth studying.

Criminological theorising of a woman's criminality being linked to her biology can be traced as far back as the 19th century (Burke, 2005). Theorists of the time reasoned that women were cognitively and emotionally inferior to men and, as such, passivity and dependence became typified as normal feminine traits. If a woman transgressed these normative behaviours and/or demonstrated signs of aggression or violence / engaged in criminality, she came to be seen as masculinised (Lombroso & Ferrero 1895 in Comack & Brickey, 2007). In this vein, biologically based theories have been used to identify and link hormones, specifically testosterone and estrogen, to acts of violence in men and women, respectively. Flowers (2003) argues that violence and aggression in men have biological origins and describes Dabbs testosterone study as very promising in linking biological deficiencies to crime. Social psychologist J.M. Dabbs in 1987 conducted a testosterone and saliva test on incarcerated males and found that inmates with the highest testosterone readings were more likely to have violent criminal pasts as

opposed to prisoners with lower levels of testosterone (p.10). Kruttschnitt et al. (2002) disagreed with the testosterone study, noting that the belief in the link between testosterone and male aggression has greatly diminished (p. 530). Kruttschnitt et al. (2002) did note that findings have linked estrogen[6] to aggression not only in women but also in men. Researchers at Pennsylvania State University found that low doses of estrogen given to girls to delay puberty showed higher levels of aggression in girls (Niehoff, 1999 in Kruttschnitt et al. 2002). In another study, researchers indicated that estrogen tested on male mice appeared to reverse the anti-aggression effects of castration (Niehoff, 1999 as cited in Kruttschnitt et al. 2002).

In 1961, Dalton's study on women's menstrual cycle found that women were more prone to violence and anti-social behaviour during the premenstrual phase of their cycles (Brookman, 2005, p. 63) because low hormonal levels created a hormonal imbalance which in turn could lead to violence. More recently, Putallaz & Bierman (2004) have suggested that fluctuations in hormone concentrations during menstrual cycles "are related to changes in cognition and moods and are similarly expected to either accentuate or decrease the probability of anti-social behaviour" (p. 26).[7] Kruttschnitt et al. (2002) stress however that attempting to understand the causation of aggression in one or more hormones is futile as behaviour evolves out of interlocking relationships that link perception, interpretation and response" (Niehoff, 1999, p. 171 as cited in Kruttschnitt et al. 2002). These studies all draw on the biological notion that when women transgress gender role expectations (passivity, dependence) and instead demonstrate aggressive or criminal behaviours, they are masculinised; their actions reveal abnormalities

[6] Estrogen is a female hormone responsible for female physical traits and helps to regulate a woman's menstrual cycle. (Marshall, 2013, Healthwise WebMD).
[7] Anti-social behaviour refers to "externalizing behaviour problems, conduct disorder symptoms, delinquency and violence" (Putallaz & Bierman, 2004, p. 23).

inherent in their genetic makeup. Before I move on in the discussion, I want to point out that studies on gender have significantly developed in the last decades but much of the work is not discussed by criminologists. Moreover, due to these developments not falling within the parameters of my research I am unable to delve into this literature.

Carney et al. (2007) in their study on violence in intimate relationships, found that female-initiated violence was equal to, or exceeded, male-initiated violence (p. 109). Jack (1999) studied aggression in 60 women from diverse backgrounds including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education. For her study, aggression was defined as "forcibly bringing one's will, desires, and voice into relationships" (p. 43). Jack examined how the women articulated aggression, in an effort to determine if / how their behaviour conformed to normative understanding of women's aggression and violence. Jack found that the meaning of participants' aggressive behaviour had to be understood in relation to their intersectional location in the social world, and, most significantly, their family upbringing and present social class (p. 43). While none of the participants in the study were convicted of a violent offense, more than half admitted to having caused physical injury to another adult. Their narratives mostly focused on how they "hid" their aggression and used stereotypical feminine behaviours, such as manipulation and bitchiness, rather than violence, to express aggression (p. 56). Jack found that aggression was strongly influenced by normative expectations of women's roles and responsibilities in relationships, arguing that "compliant relatedness" (p. 21) was a coping strategy, and that women used relational aggression to assert themselves.

Cross-cultural studies also provide insight into violence and aggression in women. Burbank (1994) conducted research on aggressive behaviour and violence among Aboriginal women in a northern Australian community of some 600 residents. She found that women

engaged in physical aggression (from slaps to murder) in 83 societies or 61% of the 137 societies studied (p. 82). Her study revealed that aggression was a way of life and that women regularly engaged in aggressive and violent behaviours (p. 5). Burbank analysed 174 "fights" and found that men were the initiators of aggression 57% of the time and women 43% of the time. Burbank's findings reveal that characteristics thought to be essentially female are in fact socially and culturally produced. Her findings debunk the normative frame of femininity, in North America, in which passivity is understood as an inherent trait of all women.

Women Who Kill

"A murderess is only an ordinary woman in a temper."

(Enid Bagnold in Jones, 2009, p.39)

Female lethal violence has been ignored in the bulk of research on homicide, which was designed to explain male offenders; women, for the most part, were "added and stirred." The "add and stir" approach "introduce[s] gender solely [in a study] as a variable if at all" (Mallicoat, 2012, p. 51) and then applies findings of studies designed for men, to both women and men. This application occurs when researchers use an existing theoretical perspective based on men and add women without making any changes to the theory or research design. Feminists argue that the "adding" women, without also changing the framework away from that which developed from the analysis of men, will marginalise the experiences of women (Schram & Tibbetts, 2013, p. 299).

Frignon (2006) contends that there is no language to critically examine cases of women who kill because the act of murder directly contradicts dominant ways of thinking about

femininity, where women are seen as nurturers, gentle, and as social conformists (Morissey, 2003). A violent woman is viewed as one who betrays her traditional role as life-giver and nurturer (Carlen, 1985; MacDonald, 1991), and this aberrant behaviour requires explanation. Much of the process of unravelling and making sense of women's violence takes place in the media where cultural sketches of women who commit murder have developed in fictional portrayals, which Morissey (2003) defines as "stock stories" (p. 7).

Stock stories or standard narratives present stereotypical characters who embody traits evaluated as either ideal or condemnable (Morissey, 2003, p. 9). Morissey argues that stock stories presented by the media are products of readily available socio-cultural narratives and that the individuality of each case—including alternative narratives—is lost in the stock story (p. 15). She presents for example the stock story of Tracy Wigginton who was labelled the "lesbian vampire killer" for the murder of Edward Baldock.[8] During the trial, Wigginton's accomplices testified that she was a vampire, and this narrative was accepted by the media despite credible reports that Wigginton was suffering from a mental illness (pp. 104 – 105). According to Seal (2010) these stock stories are reiterated through different genres, mostly gothic and true crime, but also documentary and news media; their discursive meaning eventually becomes rigid and fixed (2010, pp. 4-5).

Dr. Adelene Africa, clinical psychologist and lecturer in Gender Studies at the University of Cape Town, found three reoccurring discourses in literature that construct violent women in

[8] Edward Baldock was murdered by Tracy Wigginton in Brisbane, Australia on October 21, 1989. Wittington admitted to stabbing Baldock and virtually decapitating him and was immediately sentenced to life during a five minute trial. Her three accomplices, including her lover Lisa Ptaschinski during their trial in 1991 testified that Wittington was a vampire and had to survive on fresh blood. (Morissey, 2003, pp. 104-105).

her research: mad (psychopathology), sad (victimisation), and bad (deviance). The most prominent of the three, she contends, is the mad discourse. Africa says constructing women who kill as having genetic biological and psychological disorders medicalises violence and situates inherent dysfunction as the cause of murder (p. 80). The narrative insists that women who kill, like all deviants, share pathological conditions that separate them from the rest of law-abiding citizens (Gelsthorpe, 1989, p.18) while violence in men is understood as asserting masculinity (Kalish & Kimel, 2010; Newman 2013). It is thus a common occurrence when a woman kills, for the first question to be asked is, whether or not she was "mad."

Lombroso and Ferrero were among the first proponents of pathologising female offenders' behaviour, back in the early 19th century (Burke, 2005, p. 121). Their work on the "female criminal" described her biological make-up as primitive, abnormal, and pathological (Ibid., p. 122), essentially categorising the female offender as "other." Apart from the physical differences they found in her skull, they theorised that the female born offender greatly differed from the "normal" woman in terms of morality and social interactions. They suggested that a "normal" woman was passive and sexually conservative, while the female born offender was sexually deviant, had many masculine characteristic(s), was void of maternal instincts, and, like many male offenders, her crimes were motivated by revenge and a desire for status and money (Burke, 2005; Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). Burke (2005) adds, "In other words, the female offender is seen – within this indisputably biologically determinist characterisation – to be *masculine* and the normal woman *feminine*" (p. 122, emphases in the original).

Although Lombroso and Ferrero's work in *The Female Offender* was widely discredited as criminology moved away from the idea of criminality being innate (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010, p. 568), the Psychology and the Criminal Justice System communities both continue to locate

women's criminality within the "psy" discourses (Ussher 1992). Jane Ussher, professor of Women's Health Psychology at the University of Western Sydney, in her book *Woman's madness: Misogyny or mental illness*,[9] traces the history of how "psy" disciplines have been complicit in diagnosing females who kill as mad to keep stereotypical gender norms in place. Ussher debates "a diagnosis of madness denotes an absence of reason, this implies that women who commit crimes, who are violent are not in control of their senses" (p. 172). She asks: "Is this because criminality, violence or aggression cannot be reconciled with our conceptualisation of femininity and thus the woman must be bad?" (p. 172). If, as Ussher says, a woman who kills must be mad, and that this violence is connected to inherent cognitive or emotional defects, then this view supports mainstream psychological work on the topic. When women who kill are classified as insane, this categorisation takes away their agency and assumes their diminished responsibility in the crime. Moreover, this acceptance of the entrenched systemic belief of women who kill having an inherent psychological defect, forever equates femininity to madness.

The second discourse that attempts to explain women who kill in literature, is the victimised or "sad" woman, which emerged in the 1980s. Acknowledging that women who are violent are victims first made intimate partner violence a major social problem (Comack & Brickey, 2007, as cited in Africa, 2010, p. 81). Africa (2010) notes that identifying women who kill as victims has perpetuated stereotypical notions of femininity which hold that women are passive and helpless (p. 82), yet victimised women who kill are denied agency because the concepts of agency and victimisation oppose each other. Mahoney (1994) explains:

[9] Dr. Jane Ussher is a former clinical psychologist who resigned on ideological grounds. Her book *Woman's madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness* was first published in 1991. (*Choice Reviews Online*).

> In our society, agency and victimisation are each known by the absence of the other: you are an agent if you are not a victim, and you are a victim if you
> are in no way an agent. In this concept, agency does not mean acting for oneself under conditions of oppression; it means being without oppression,
> either having ended oppression or never having experienced it at all (p. 64).

The third discourse used to explain female killers is deviance, which focuses on women who are products of "bad" environments (Africa, 2010, p.83). Unlike mad and sad discourses, which focus on intrapsychic deficiencies, the "bad" discourse concentrates on how structural factors account for women's violence and reflects macro-level forces. In attempts to understand gender and specific crime, theorists have focused on women's position in society. Africa contends that these studies are problematic as researchers attempt to take theories that account for men's crime to apply them to women, without examining women's gendered experiences; this is similar to the "add and stir" approach discussed earlier. Further, Africa argues that while aggregate studies have succeeded in profiling female offending in certain sectors "focusing on women's positionality as a causal mechanism in their violence, studies run the risk of stigmatising marginalised women such that violence becomes synonymous with being poor, unemployed, and Black" (p.84). It should be noted that while my research does not take an explicitly intersectional approach, there are empirical studies on homicide that explore, among other things, the correlation between family history, race, socio-economic status, and a women's commission of violent crime (DeWees & Parker, 2003; Steffensmeier & Haynie, 2000).

Knelman (1998) found that women have always killed in a variety of adverse circumstances, but that their killings were not reported.[10] While readers of Victorian novels categorised female murderers as "wicked, oversexed, highly emotional women" the reality is that

[10] Mothers killed their children when they could no longer provide for them or when they were tired of caring for their children (Knelman, 1998, p. 5).

the murder is the only unorthodox event to occur in the lives of these women. Their lives were "ordinary" (p. 14). Other studies on women who kill also contend that they are "ordinary" women (Allen 1990; Hartman, 1977). Ordinary in these studies denotes women who killed persons known to them, usually family and/or friends with the homicide occurring in the home and due to an argument with no premeditated planning or elaborate means of killing the victim but using only the weapon(s) at hand such as a knife or firearm (Mann 1996, p. 164).

White and Kowalski (1994) argue that the perception that men are more aggressive than women is an enduring stereotype that is never challenged because of the negative ways in which female aggression is labelled (pp. 487 – 488). They argue that data that shows fewer women than men commit murder can be misleading as the figures validate the idea that women are less aggressive than men. The authors explain that in cultures where males are expected to be nurturers and females aggressive, that there is a "reversal of the traditional '"male as aggressor" paradigm" (p. 490). White and Kowalski suggest that while the construction of males as aggressive and females as non-aggressive exists in North America, they maintain that in other cultures women and men may have equal levels of aggression and if a woman is placed in the right circumstance "are as likely to display aggression as men" (p. 490).

Lind and Brzuzy (2008) support this argument adding that "as the mother, nurturer and caregiver [a woman] is arguably one of the most prominent and enduring stereotypes of women" (p.121). Women committing murder falls outside conventional trappings of female roles as their bodies were created to bear life and not stamp it out (Knelman, 1998, p. 3). For instance, the title of "female terrorists" as a term is often seen as contradictory (The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2005), although she exists. The female terrorist is an unlikely perpetrator who can use her embodiment of gender stereotypes to escape public scrutiny and

avoid detection from officials. A decade ago, the Israeli government posted a warning on its website regarding the increase of Palestinian women in terrorism including roles as suicide bombers. The alert read: "the terrorist organizations behind the attacks want to exploit the advantages of dispatching females to perpetrate them . . . under the assumption that a female is thought of as soft, gentle, and innocent and therefore will arouse less suspicion than a man" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011, p. 1). The preceding example shows that like women who kill their intimate partners, female terrorists also evoke a similar response by the public because women are not considered as violent offenders which goes against mainstream categorisations of women being the gentler and nurturing sex.

According to many authors, when women kill, they are most likely to kill their current or former intimates (Block & Christakos, 1995; Browne & Williams, 1989; DeJong et al., 2011; Gauthier & Bankston, 1997). Saltzman and Mercy (1993) define intimate victims as "relatives, friends, neighbours and work associates" and alternatively in terms of "kinship, intimacy and shared docile" (p. 66). Goetting (1995) contends that violent female perpetrators almost always have some kind of close relationship with their victim(s). Nearly 80% of homicides committed by women involve intimate partners as the victims (Ogle et al., 1995). Dershowitz (1994) argues that women kill intimates more often than strangers because of close familial ties and passions generated by continual family interactions. Nonetheless, aggression is viewed as unnatural in women. Campbell (1993) suggests that women are taught that (their) aggression is wrong and should not be expressed (p. 22). Campbell's study about the experiences of aggression among men and women found that men use aggression and violence to take control whereas women's aggressions emerge as a loss of self-control. Further, Campbell found that women "hold in their rage and often cry to release their frustration" (p. 47) but when they can no

longer contain this frustration, some women will erupt, and physical manifestation of aggression can occur. Jones (2009) sees the increased awareness of aggressive behaviour in females as creating anxiety among those threatened by women's freedom. White and Kowalski (1994) add that when women change the power dynamic in personal relationships by refusing to be physically abused or otherwise treated unfavourably by their partners, men sense their control being lost and thereby resort to labelling the partner as "bad" (p. 497).

"Snapping" or Deliberate Acts

In February 2010, Harvard educated university professor Dr. Amy Bishop gunned downed six of her colleagues at the University of Alabama in Huntsville; three died (Wallace, 2011). In March 2007, astronaut and 20-year Navy veteran, Lisa Nowak was charged with attempted first-degree murder and kidnapping of her love interest's girlfriend. Nowak's family described the events as "completely out of character" and described her as a "caring, intelligent, dedicated mother to her three children" (Springer, 2007). These incidents, heavily reported in the popular press, are examples of the types of storylines that are documented on the television show *Snapped.*

Conway and Seigelman (1995) define "snapping" as a "sudden, drastic alteration of personality" (p.13). The authors' focus encompasses not only the violence commonly associated with "snapping" but also the dramatic life changes made by persons with no clear catalyst as to the reason for the change. Dr. Peter Ash, Director of the Psychiatry and Law Service at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, explains a precursor to "snapping" includes "build up" which essentially includes planning (as cited in Landau, 2009). Dr. Lyle Rossiter, a forensic psychiatrist, concurs with Dr. Ash's assessment, adding that build up times vary with different

individuals. He explains that ordinarily, psychological build up[11] to violence can take a few days, but that persons with for example, a bipolar disorder, can experience psychological build up ending in violence in a matter of hours.

Landau (2009) explains that these medical experts identify a number of risk factors to "snapping," including brain tumours, seizures, substance abuse, and psychological disorders and further point out however that risk factors are only warning signs and not predictors (para. 9). Dr. Roland Segal, a forensic psychiatrist in Phoenix, Arizona says that the link between "snapping" and mental disorders is controversial, as persons suffering from mental disorders are in most cases non-violent. But, Dr. Segal adds, doctors have found a connection between "snapping" and life experience: "When mental health professionals evaluate perpetrators of violent crimes, they look at relevant defining events and personality traits. For example, the person may have experienced or witnessed violence or abuse early in life" (in Landau, 2009, para. 13). While Dr. Ash concludes that it is striking to engage in a conversation with persons who have "snapped," "people who have done things like this, how they're really preoccupied with their own feeling and have in their mind stopped thinking of the other person as a real full human being" (18). When a woman kills and her actions are understood to have occurred because she "snapped," her crime moves from the physical into the mental domain. The "snapping" of female killers suggest that the aberrant act of murder was not cold or calculated but the result of psychosis, or, as Africa (2010) points to, "madness." It should be underscored that "snapping" is a historical claim referenced by medical experts within the parameters of this research, but which has since been refuted in the academic field of criminology, in law and in medicine.

[11] Psychological buildup stems from a pathway to violence that starts with thinking, fantasizing and then planning (Landau, 2009, para. 4).

Notwithstanding this, “snapping” remains a legitimate explanation in media representations of violent women particularly in television and film for example the “snapping” of character Dolores Daniels in *Shutter Island*; or character Annie Lavery in *All My Children*. Johnson and Miller (2016) explain that in order to make sense of social phenomena such as violence by women, media producers through framing “have symbolic power to assert the narratives of certain privileged and dominant perspectives in ways that ultimately lead to widespread, if erroneous, perceptions” (p. 212). As such, the historical concept of “snapping” remains relevant for my project that has the medium of television as an underlying theme.

Schurman-Kauflin (2000) contends that female serial killers spark a panic in society because they use less detectable ways to kill such as poison or smothering, rather than guns and/or knives like male multiple murderers. Commenting on women who kill their spouses, Schurman-Kauflin says that they fantasize about the murder, the before and after of the act (p. 147). The amount of time between kills and lack of physical evidence left by female serial killers, and the premeditation of women who kill their husbands, may point to the great restraint shown by female killers, one which undermines the idea of women who kill “snapping,” and may, rather, suggest agency.

Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez (2006) define agency, in this context, as the possibility that women are involved in violent acts as rational subjects acting within existing power relations (p. 322). I use this definition because agency presents another route to understanding of the women who kill on *Snapped*, a way that challenges the salience of dominant theories and demonstrates that women’s violence can be deliberate. Further, agency allows one to consider the complexities of gender as a social construct rather than an inherent, biological fact.

Comack and Brickey's (2007) research, which attempts to unravel the meaning that women make of their own violence, emanates from the idea that language is constitutive. In order to challenge the normative framework of violent women being "mad," "sad," and "bad," they conducted semi-structured interviews of 18 Canadian inmates. The women ranged in age from 18 to 60 years old, with the majority identifying as belonging to racialised groups; only five were identified as white (p. 6). The violence the women perpetrated ranged from minor incidents of pushing and slapping to major incidents of causing bodily harm, use of a deadly weapon, and two attempted murder charges (p. 6). The participants all defined as prior victims of physical violence and sexual violence (p. 9). During parts of the narrative(s), however they revealed their agency as initiator of violence toward their partner(s) and strangers in other social contexts, challenging their status as victims (p.11-13) who we categorise today as survivors. The study also found that the participants rejected their classification of "mad"—in the sense of mentally ill or unstable. Rather, they identified themselves as angry, stating that violence emerged from their anger and not from mental illness (p. 17). The participants also rejected the label "bad," admitting only to acting "badly" to ensure their survival in certain situations, such as life on the streets or in prison (pp.20, 26). Comack and Brickey (2007) concluded that violent women occupy a multiplicity of subject positions; their identities are fluid and that their violent acts are linked to their gendered experiences, including gendered experiences of violence (p. 26).

Kingston (2008) argues that most of the perpetrators on *Snapped* "know exactly what they're doing, even if their reasoning isn't exactly sound: they kill to relieve themselves of men who are interfering with their greater ambitions — or who merely have ticked them off mightily" (p. 71). Daly (1998) says that although a connection exists between victimisation and women offending, women do not have to be victims to be culpable of violent offences (p. 233). It should

be noted that this project is not suggesting victimisation is not a valid reason connected to why women kill but it is not the focus of this paper.

Television "reality" and crime

American television had its birth in 1941 (Udelson, 1982). The evolution of television from black and white to colour, analog to digital, and to new media platforms such as TV on airplanes and on handheld devices, makes television no longer a "stand-alone medium" (Turner & Tay, 2009, p. 7). Screen Arts and Culture scholar Sheila Murphy (2011) describes television as a conduit "for both informational discourses and a wide array of narrative and representational genres of entertainment media" (p. 7). Cummins and Gordon (2006) refer to television as the dominant medium of mass communication (p.xiv). They argue that television plays the central role in advancing shifting attitudes which in turn, create new societal norms:

> What the public sees day after day, for many hundreds of hours each year, becomes natural, a presentation of the way things are, even when those things were initially shocking to a majority and remain so for a minority of viewers. What had been forbidden or even unknown becomes transformed into familiar features of the American mainstream. More than any medium before or since, TV gives us our impressions of what the world is really like – how people live their lives, the landscape and the buildings they inhabit, the ways they interact and what they value. (Cummins & Gordon, 2006, p. 27)

Following the arguments presented by Cummins and Gordon, viewers of *Snapped* are presented with real stories about women who kill, stories which are otherwise rarely broadcast on television as they contain unthinkable acts that confound and challenge traditional discourses of stereotypical femininity.

The allure of the "snapped" woman's lethal violence is what the producers of *Snapped*, now in its 29th Season, have banked on to make the show one of Oxygen Network's longest

running hits, becoming the fourth telecast on the network to top 1 million viewers in one broadcast (Klein, 2019). The privately held Oxygen[12] Media was purchased by NBC Universal in 2011, previously a subsidiary of General Electric, before Comcast Corp bought rights to NBCU in 2011(Wilson, 2012). Oxygen Network promos position the show as documentary and RTV, in other words a hybrid of the two genres. Kraidy (2005) defines hybridization as the "fusion of two hitherto distinct forms, styles, or identities (p. 5).

Grierson (1966) defined documentary as the "creative treatment of actuality" (p.16) meaning a truthful representation of real events on camera (Wilma de Jong, 2002, p.20). While Hill (2005) refers to RTV as popular and true-to-life and suggests that the genre is a hybrid as it is "located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama" (p. 2). Jermyn (2007) says there is a fluidity around the way 'crime fiction' and 'real life' crime are constructed on contemporary TV (p. 4). *Snapped* is the kind of real crime documentary that cannot be compared with television dramas like *Quincy M.E.* (NBC 1978–83), a series that focuses on a Los Angeles County medical examiner and in which forensics were utilised to obtain facts about suspicious deaths, or *America's Most Wanted* (Fox 2988, 2011, Lifetime 2011-12), a reality legal series, where appeals were made to the audience to help locate criminals and bring them to justice. *Snapped*, by contrast, was influenced by the stunning growth of RTV in the early 2000 and the ways it examined lethal violence by women draws heavily on the tenets of "tabloidism" such as the idea of ordinary people being caught up in extraordinary circumstances.

Critics often linked early reality crime shows to tabloid journalism, with their focus on spectacles of violence and tragedy. The U.S. reality crime show came of age in 1987

[12] Oxygen in 2017 rebranded to focus primarily on true crime shows.

when *Unsolved Mysteries* aired its pilot hosted by Raymond Burr (Fishman & Cavender 1998; Bondebjerg, 1996). *America's Most Wanted*'s debut came a year later and was quickly followed by *Cops*, *American Detectives*, *Untold Stories of the FBI*, to name just a few (Fishman & Cavender, 1998). These shows portrayed private citizens sharing their stories of crime and tragedy. Other types of series were added to the crime reality genre, including courtroom proceedings with programmes like *The People's Court* and *Judge Judy* where the judge dispenses his/her brand of justice for lawbreakers. Jermyn (2007) contends that the critique of real crime TV lies in the blurring of boundaries "be that through mixing 'entertainment' formats with serious 'information'; through the conflation of 'fact' and 'fiction'" (p. 15).

Today, crime reality shows all compete for a piece of the ratings pie in a medium that is not static but perpetually evolves. According to the Oxygen website *Snapped* is its most successful show to date. Part of the appeal of shows that feature real homicide cases like *Snapped* may be that viewers can have a "thank God" that's not me experience and be glad their family is "normal" (Kozak, 2013, para 5 as cited in Goff, 2013). While *Snapped's* narrative terrain and aesthetics frame the show in the documentary tradition, and its sensational cases of women killers link it to RTV, *Snapped* falls more specifically under the umbrella of true crime television.

True Crime Genre

A genre is a category of cultural production and is defined by formulaic elements, and is found across all mediums, from television to literature, film, and video games (Cavender & Jurik 2016, p. 322, 23). Turnbull (2014) contends that we can interpret genre is as "a system of categorisation that has to do with a range of other factors, including the operations of the media

industries, the production and policy context, the scheduling practices, the audience, the reviewers, and the critics" (Mittell in Turnbull, p. 4). Crime has always been a popular subject of media, in earlier periods it was well represented in print media and radio; in television, true crime is described as "one of the most enduring and diverse genres of television" ((Turnbull, 2014, p. 2).

The Newgate Calendar which detailed stories of criminals awaiting trial at Newgate Prison in London, first appeared in the 17th century, and is one of the earliest examples of the true crime genre (Turnbull, 2014, p. 20; Cavender & Jurik 2016, p. 322). In fact, according to Sussex (in Turnbull 2014), the publication remained active for more than two hundred years (p. 20). Cavender & Jurik (2016) maintain that "The *Newgate Calendar* pioneered a presentational style that still characterises many crime genre productions today, that is, a sense of realism" (p. 322).

Snapped which celebrated 16 years of production and aired its 500th episode in November 2020, profiles true crime stories of women investigated for or charged with murder. These "real stories" or murder narratives are shaped by the narrator and "imbued with his or her values or beliefs about such events" (Murley, 2008, p.6). Murley argues that because murder narratives are always "somewhat fictive, no matter the reality of the event being discussed they reveal the underlying preoccupations and perspectives on "serious transgression" in ways that other texts – stories about sports, say, or dance – do not" (p. 6).

In the BBC News online article titled "Is Our Growing Obsession with True Crime A Problem?," Deborah Allen, Vice President of Programming for Jupiter Entertainment one of the biggest producers of true crime television in the US and the producers of *Snapped* said she has seen a "huge jump" in audience interest over the last few years and that the demand calls for

Jupiter to make 200 hours of crime shows annually. Steven Land, CEO of Jupiter Entertainment in Klein's article titled "Oxygen's True Crime Rebrand Keeps Paying Off…", said the premise behind *Snapped* was to flip the script so to speak and "have the female not as the victim but as the perpetrator was unique at the time" (Klein, 2019, para 9). Land said initially, he believed neither Oprah Winfrey nor Geraldine Laybourne, network founders, were fond of the idea of true crime, and ad sales were down. Steve Bonn, criminologist said true crime was "low brow" when the network started and had not elevated before the debut of *Snapped* in 2004 which he described as "the show that started it all" (para 7). Klein (2019) reported that Oxygen had 11.1 million on-demand views in August of 2019. "In fact, Oxygen experienced the biggest growth in viewers of any TV entertainment channel in 2018" (Klein, 2019, para 2).

Cavender & Jurik (2016) contend that the true crime genre is important because it includes "stories that investigate the human condition, but within the framework of crime and the CJS."[13] Murley (2008) reasons that true crime makes sense of the senseless and has "become a worldview, an outlook and a perspective on contemporary American life, one that is suspicious and cynical, narrowly focused on the worst kinds of crimes and preoccupied with safety, order and justice" (p. 2). She says that fans of true crime read true-crime material and watch the television shows and movies in an effort to uncover answers about human behaviour (p. 3). She contends that the true crime genre raises significant issues about law in the digital age particularly narrative evidence while adding that "the ways that real murder is narrated, and therefore understood by any given culture, change through time and with differing historical circumstances" (p. 6).

[13] The Criminal Justice System or CJS is a network of government and private agencies that manage accused and convicted criminals. The CJS consists of four components, legislation, law enforcement, the judiciary and corrections (Patterson, 2018).

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides logical sense to the research by establishing a particular lens through which one examines a topic (Sinclair, 2007). In this chapter I examine feminist criminology. I define and explain this theoretical orientation and include a brief history which provides a setting for this project. I draw on Chris Weedon's work on feminist post-structuralism with a specific focus on the concepts of discourse and power as they relate to gender and agency. Using a poststructuralist framework has allowed me to explore and critique traditional understandings of gender within criminological discourse, focusing most specifically on the question of agency and allowing me to more fully detail how women who kill are conceptualised.

Feminist Criminology

This thesis is rooted in feminist criminology, as the focus of my work concerns gender and criminality. Feminist criminology conceptualises gender as a complex social product and, to the same degree, argues that systems of knowledge must include intellectual inquiry into women's lives. According to Mullins and Miller (as cited in Barlow & Decker, 2010) feminist criminology refers to "that body of criminological research and theory that situates the study of crime and criminal justice within a complex understanding that the social world is systematically shaped by relations of sex and gender" (p. 218). For the purposes of this thesis, I understand gender to denote the socially produced differences between being feminine and being masculine (De Oliveira, 2008, p. 2). Lorber (as cited in Ore, 2006) maintains that gender as a process not only defines "woman" and "man" but also assigns the rights and responsibilities of each identity

from birth (p. 114 -115). To “do gender” she says, is to behave in the prescribed ways of learning social roles and sexual preferences of your gender identity. Lorber insists that while “resistance and rebellion have altered gendered norms, so far they have rarely eroded the statuses” (p. 115). Chesney-Lind (1997) contends that gender must be fully theorised in order to understand why women offend.

Historically, the study of crime focused solely on male subjects; female subjects if included were evaluated on biological characteristics (Belknap, 2007; Burke, 2005; Newburn, 2007). The female violent offender for example was thought to be a hermaphrodite who lacked female instincts (Britton, 2011) and according to Cesare Lombroso (in Britton, 2011) “psychologically and anthropologically she belongs more to the male than to the female sex”. Lombroso introduced the idea of "born criminals" to the academic debate in 1911 in his book *Criminal Man According to Classification of Cesare Lombroso*. Lombroso and Ferrero's 1895 work, *Female Offender*, theorised that a female offender possessed a "virile cranium" – a signifier of male criminality as well, suggesting that female offenders were more masculine / like men and less like “normal” women (in Burke, 2005, p. 122). Lombroso and Ferrero’s (1895) idea about what “normal” or “good” women were, offer the following examples: they were the “gentle, chaste, and caring wives and mothers; “criminal” women were categorised as wicked and deceitful and the violent woman who was branded as unnatural and a monster (as cited by Comack & Brickey, 2007, p. 2). While Lombroso's biological explanations for crime are now largely discredited, Lombroso is lauded for directing early criminologists to the scientific study of criminals (Burke, 2005), and for bringing attention to female criminality (Newburn, 2007). Further, criminologists such as Gelsthorpe (2002) highlight Dalton's work linking menstruation

and crime[14] to demonstrate the continued legacy of biological theories that attempt to explain female criminality (Newburn, 2007, p.302).

The first phase of feminist contributions to criminology took place during the 1960's and 1970's and is regarded as the activist stage. It coincided with the growth of feminist protest movements, where male bias in academia, politics, labour, and other institutions of daily life were challenged (Carrington & Hogg, 2002, p. 115). The focal point of protests by some academic feminists was the historical neglect of women in crime research (Newburn, 2007). During this phase, emerging feminist criminologists aimed to develop empirical studies on women's experiences of crime within their capacity as "lawbreakers, victims, and workers in the justice system" (Daly & Maher, 1998, p. 2). Feminist scholars like Carol Smart and Francis Heidensohn lobbied for the development of theoretical perspectives on female criminality to be included into the traditional male-centered field (Burke, 2005, p.166). These scholars believed that an inclusive approach to criminology would eliminate existing gender bias.

This first phase of feminist criminology challenged the omission of women from academic research and argued for women to be integrated into criminological research (p.164). Naffine (1997) contends when women were featured in traditional academic writing, they were confined to an obligatory chapter in a criminology text. She argued that traditional criminology research is problematic, in that "it" presents itself as a "human science" but focuses on an overwhelming number of male research subjects and very few females (p. 9). Newburn (2007)

[14] Dalton's study can be linked to Otto Pollak's generative phases of women theory. Pollak theorised that during the menstrual cycle women are reminded that they can never become men and the subsequent distress results in a higher susceptibility to crime (Burke, 2005, p. 122).

argues that the omission of female criminality from academic study has helped to perpetuate normative frameworks used to understand violent female offenders (p. 305).

The second phase of feminist criminology began in the late 1980's and called into question criminological discourses that considered women a "unified category" without considerations of race, class and sexuality (Daly & Maher, 1998, p. 3). While the first phase focused on having female offenders included in criminological research projects, feminist scholars during the second wave were interested in what motivated women to offend, comparing and contrasting the female and male offenders, and examining women's experiences within the criminal justice system (Mallicoat, 2012, p.2,). Feminist political movements put the spotlight on victims and created more space for women in the criminal justice system as police officers, both groups shared their experiences with feminist criminologists during this phase (p. 2). While the oppression of women is central to feminist criminology, feminism is not a unitary system. There are a variety of feminist theoretical perspectives on crime (Burke, 2009, p.192).

According to Burke, there are six main contemporary variants of feminism: Liberal Feminism; Radical Feminism; Marxist Feminism; Socialist Feminism; Black Feminism and Postmodern / Post-structuralist Feminism.[15] These articulations of feminism which emerged over

[15] Burke (2009, p. 193-4) defines the six main variants of feminism as follows: Liberal Feminism is concerned with equality with men. Women's subordination is examined as a part of the analysis of the wider social structures. The push for legislation for equal pay and sex discrimination can be attributed to Liberal Feminism. Radical Feminism focuses on patriarchy as controlling force over women and advocates for the separation of women from men in varying degrees including personal relationships. Marxist Feminism recognizes a patriarchal structure but sees this rooted in a women's role in a capitalist arena which is domesticity. Women are viewed as being a part of a reserved labour force – called upon when needed in the capital market and discarded when a there is a surplus. Socialist Feminism focuses on production of goods and gender categories, i.e. follow "dual systems theory" of radical and Marxist Feminism. Black Feminism examines structure of domination at all levels and how black women navigate these structures. Black Feminism, through its critique of the mostly white middle class feminist movement, has opened up the discourse on diversity of female experiences. Postmodern Feminism celebrates individual difference and seeks to embrace diversity in all women.

two decades ago, pose slightly different questions for the study of criminality and genders (Walklate, 1998, p.79). For the purposes of this thesis, I have used a post-structuralist feminist framework.

Feminist Post-structuralism

Feminist Post-structuralism is often considered part of Feminist Postmodernism (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1995). In my thesis research, I draw on Chris Weedon's (1987) poststructuralist work to investigate the narratives that *Snapped* presents about women who kill. According to Weedon (1987): "Feminism is a politics. It is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become" (p. 1). A poststructuralist perspective postulates that, rather than being static, people and knowledge are unstable, constantly constituted and reconstituted by and through discourses (p. 21). More specifically, a person's subjectivity (identity) is reconstituted and constituted in discourse. Two key concepts of poststructuralist theory are discourse and power, below I examine these, as well as the concepts agency and gender construction. Together, these concepts offer greater insight into contemporary understandings and representations of gender and crime.

Discourse and Power

Poststructuralist theorists are concerned with how discourses shape an identity and reality, in this case, women's identities and realities (Mills et al., 2010). The dominant discourses through which women who kill are constructed are that they are victims (sad), deviants (bad) and

mentally unstable (mad) (Africa, 2010). Howarth (2000) defines discourse as ‘‘historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects’’ (in Comack and Brickey 2007 p.4). Weedon (1987) points out that these historical ways of knowing, shape subjectivities and power relations within a discursive field (p. 20). According to Weedon, subjectivity refers to "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p 32). She says that it is through language and discourse that a sense of self is produced (p. 21). Further, she argues that underscoring the historical aspect of subjectivities is valuable for feminism because it clarifies that dominant discourses of femininity and masculinity exist within a particular context and are not separate from discursive practices (and therefore power relations). In other words, they can be resisted, and that change is possible (McLaren 2004, pp.220-3).

Notwithstanding Weedon’s (1987) argument, women do not fit perfectly into a mold of identity that totally conforms or rejects femininity. As a result, explanations for lethal violence are problematic as it negates the accepted Western view of dominant discourses of femininity including such descriptors as: helplessness; irrationality; and weakness (Comack & Brickey, 2007; Filetti, 2001). Kelly (1996) contends that feminists in the 1970s refused to dissect women’s violence because this action was seen as detracting from men’s violent behaviour toward women (p. 34). Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) concur, that through the 1990s and early 2000s, mainstream feminists have been relatively silent on, or have even reinforced stereotypical, popular discourses, that represent lesbians and female juvenile offenders as masculine – not real women (p.30). They add that when feminists have found their voice on the subject, they have often perpetuated these sdiscourses. Gilbert (2002) suggests that proper

feminist analysis would allow for the subjectivities of the female offender to come to the fore as a multilayered discourse (p. 1296).

Feminist post-structuralism flourished in the 1960s and 1970s mainly in Europe, France to be more specific. Unlike previous feminist leadings, feminist post-structuralism rejected absolutes (Williams, 1990, p. 1778) and stressed the changing dynamic of power. Foucault (in Cook, 2011, para. 4) concurs that power changes over time, and that it is within this power shift that a discourse becomes dominant and over time is framed as "true". Once the discourse is framed as "true" it then has power but again power changes which is an advantage of this perspective. For example, when some of the women on *Snapped* agreed to be a part of the show production through interviews, they operated in a power dynamic in that they were able to present their narratives for the large viewership.

Says Weedon (1987):

> The principles of feminist post-structuralism can be applied to all discursive practices as a way of analyzing how they are structured, what power relations they produce and reproduce, where there are resistances and where we might look for weak points more open to challenge and transformation. (p. 136).

Post-structuralism therefore sees power as a productive force rather than being a repressive force alone whereby something is only gained and then lost.

Agency

Looking at the women depicted on *Snapped*, one may argue that the murderous acts they committed were committed with agency and they thereby rejected normative feminine ideals such as passivity and gentleness. McCann (2005) contends that it is rare to think of persons as

evil, yet "if we accept the idea at all we are likely to have in mind actions that display a truly vicious or malevolent streak—things like torturing others just to see them suffer or setting fire to a forest for the excitement of watching it burn" (p. 746). Further, as agency deals with the ways in which women assert power in relationships, if the way we understand female lethal violence is limited to dominant discourses of pathologisation, victimisation, and deviance, the role of women's agency, if present, cannot be explored or challenged. According to Davies (1993): "[P]ost-structuralism opens up the possibility of agency to the subject through the very act of making visible the discursive threads through which their experience of themselves as specific beings is woven" (p. 12). Traditional discourses that explain women who kill are just that, ideologies that have been accepted over a long period of time. As such, a poststructuralist lens allows categories to be deconstructed allowing the emergence of other discourses which may include agency.

Gender Construction

Sex and gender are socially constructed statuses (Easteal, 2003; Mills, 1997). From birth, identities are socially produced as a part of the ongoing hegemonic socialisation process throughout our lives whereby we "perform" gender (Butler, 1990). Lorber (in Ore 2006) builds on this assertion arguing that gender is a social and not a biological construct and "such a part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced (p. 113). She refers to gender as a social institution and a dominant way in which humans organise their lives (p. 114). Lorber contends "As a social institution, gender is a process of creating distinguishable social statuses

for the assignment of rights and responsibilities" (p.114). She explains that in almost every encounter human beings produce gender in either ways deemed or learnt to be appropriate for their gender, or they resist against these learnt behaviours (p. 115). Consequently, it is not until these gender norms are transgressed that societal actors take notice as in the case of *Snapped* which showcases women who kill.

Coupled with this "performing" of gender, in a patriarchal social order, women are taught to be passive, and men are accepted as aggressive. James Gilligan who formulated the theory of asymmetrical gender roles adds that men are "violence-objects and women are sex-objects" (2001, p. 57). He explains that men and women are socially constructed to be unequal whereby male shame comes from an individual attributing his female connection to him for instance a man being called a "bitch" because it challenges his construction of gender. Women on the other hand, are embarrassed when words are directed at their chastity such as "whore" (p. 58). According to Theiss (2019) women feel violated not only by physical intrusions "but also social and verbal slights of their virtue" (p.174). Jay (in Ore 2006) explains that discourses of femininity and masculinity function to regulate gender norms as they are central to the operation of patriarchal norms. She says "That which is defined, separated out, isolated from all else is A and pure. Not-A is necessarily impure, a random catchall, to which nothing is external except A and the principle of order that separates it from Not-A" (p.115). Lorber adds that in Western society "man" is A, "woman" is Not-A in Ore (p.115). Therefore, when women kill, they are viewed as rebellious or abnormal, as worse than male criminals not for the severity of the criminal act alone but for stepping outside of their prescribed gender role of femininity and passivity (Belknap, 2007, p.32).

I draw on the poststructuralist theory which informs my work. While intrinsic beliefs

exist about gender, poststructuralism allows for the deconstruction of gender identity whereby identities can be understood as socially constructed. The poststructuralist perspective is that masculinity and femininity are not static and therefore this fluidity opens space for exploration of new discourses of femininity and masculinity (Pease, 1999).

Chapter Four

Methodology

To answer my research question "How does *Snapped* challenge or reaffirm the dominant theories of women who kill?" I utilise qualitative research. As my research focuses on the medium of television, I adopt qualitative content analysis, but I also use thematic analysis to uncover themes in the show. Using content analysis with a specific focus on thematic analysis, I was able to investigate how mainstream criminological theories of women who kill are presented as mad, sad, or bad in *Snapped.*

Carrington (1989) states that "doing research involves a dynamic process of tension between theory and methodology formulation and reformation and thinking and doing" (p.59). In this chapter I discuss how I conducted my research and unpack the qualitative approach I took in the analysis of my dataset. This project uses the first season of *Snapped* as the basis for my analysis of representations of violent female perpetrators in a true crime series. This thesis engages with the narratives presented on the show to ask if and how female killers are positioned as mad, sad, or bad, or if they are shown to possess agency. I consider the continuities and the discontinuities between empirical research on violent women and their depiction in popular culture. Below, I define the qualitative research methods that I used in this project, content analysis, and a thematic analysis including the advantages and disadvantages of these methods. I detail my procedure for data collection and coding to explain how I arrived at the themes in my project.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research engages what constitutes a social world and usually emphasises "an

inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, and the generation of theories" (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p.15). This means that qualitative study allows researchers to uncover patterns of relationship in the research. Jupp (2006) points out that qualitative research, "is concerned to explore the subjective meanings through which people interpret the world, the different ways in which reality is constructed (through language, images and cultural artefacts) in particular contexts" (p. 249). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research applies the use and analysis of varying empirical materials such as "case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artefacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual's lives" (p.4).

The method I utilised to conduct my research was qualitative content analysis. Content analysis, a form of qualitative research, is "a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings" (Berg, 2009, p. 338). According to Berg (2009) content analysis is useful for the study of multiple forms of communication inclusive of electronic data. Content analysis is said to be multifaceted and able to be "fruitfully employed to examine virtually any type of communication" (Abrahamson in Berg 2009, p. 342). Krippendorff (2004) adds that content analysis is regularly used in mass communication. In essence, content analysis entails a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, or symbolic matter for the purpose of thematic analysis (p. 3). As my research examined the themes found in *Snapped,* content analysis was well-suited for the project as the process helped in determining whether the reoccurring themes in the show supported or undermined the theoretical formulations used to explain woman who kill.

I chose to study *Snapped* because I was already a regular viewer of the series, and I was fascinated by the real-life stories of women who kill. I chose the first season because while the show is currently in its 29th season and the particulars of each show unique, the uniformity of the production package has not changed. Anyone researching the series can start from any season and find the same format: a narrator introduces the content; the background of perpetrator is given followed by interviews with the perpetrator, law enforcement, psychologists, family, and friends. Each episode is 30 minutes in length, so one season was a practical limit to my data set for the purpose of this thesis. Finally, season one was available on DVD prior to the accessibility of streaming video, which allowed me easy access to my data.

Disadvantages and Advantages of Content Analysis

While content analysis is effective for uncovering narrative frames and themes in text, some argue that it is limited by being too subjective to the whims of researchers, meaning that "qualitative findings rely too much on the researchers' often unsystematic views (and values) about what is significant and important and also on the close personal relationships that many researchers strike up with the people studied" (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 157). One of the main critiques of qualitative content analysis is its perceived lack of scientific rigour (Krippendorff, 2004). Replication of findings from content analysis is difficult. Bryman and Teevan (2005) do point out that replication in the social sciences is always complicated. They explain that in qualitative research "the investigator is the main instrument of data collection, so that what is observed and heard and also what the researcher decides to concentrate upon is very much a product of personal predilection" (p. 157). I submit that while replication is possible in

this project, it is not the goal of my work which is, rather, to provide concrete research material unravelling theories about women who kill.

There are several advantages to using content analysis that should be noted. As my thesis has roots in feminist criminology, Bryman and Teevan (2005) contend that qualitative research is compatible with feminist research. They explain:

> The link between feminism and qualitative research is by no means a cut-and-dried issue, in that, although it became something of an orthodoxy among some writers, it has not found favour with all feminists…The notion of an affinity between feminism and qualitative research has at least two main components: a view that quantitative research is inherently incompatible with feminism and a view that qualitative research provides greater opportunity for a feminist sensitivity to come to the fore (p.161).

When analysing the content, the goal was to get a deeper understanding of the narrative presented by the show and the narrative given by the female killer. Qualitative research allows for the nuances in the episodes to be studied.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis focuses on identification, organisation, and description of themes within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is centered on the data, and once themes are discovered these themes are used to describe, compare, and explain the arguments of the project (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.86). Adopting a thematic analysis enables grouping of similar themes and the highlighting of important findings. One of the main advantages of thematic analysis is that it is a highly flexible research tool. This advantage also presents a disadvantage in that being flexible a lack of cohesion may result. According to Nowell et. al (2017) to overcome this obstacle the researcher needs only to employ "an epistemological position that can coherently underpin the study's empirical claims" (p. 2).

Studying Snapped

This thematic analysis is applied to the true crime series *Snapped.* My dataset concentrates on the first season of *Snapped* alone as my thesis is a historical inquiry into how women who kill during the inception of *Snapped* are conceptualised on the show. When I began my thesis, I purchased the first season of *Snapped* on DVD so as to have it at my disposal in the event the online episodes on YouTube were no longer available. The two discs in the package comprise 13 episodes, an average of 27 minutes each or approximately six and a half hours of uninterrupted viewing.

Data Collection

Being a fan of *Snapped* I had years earlier watched the first season but of course that was for entertainment and shock value alone. My first viewing of all of the episodes, one episode after the other until I retired for the evening, took two nights. I watched late at night sprawled across my bed, with my phone on silent; this duplicated what I habitually did when I watched *Snapped* at home prior to beginning my research. Further, it aided in me watching without interruption and succeeded in suppressing scholarly and critical thought about what I was seeing.

My second and subsequent viewings were all different from the first setting in my school apartment; they all took place in the Arts Graduate Room at Saint Mary's University. For these viewings I utilised headphones. I sat at the desk with my binder and pen and played my discs on the media player programme on the desktop computer. My binder had tabs that delineated the dominant themes that were examined in my literature review: mad (mental illness); sad (victimisation); bad (deviance) and agency (intentional action). As I watched each episode, I would write the name of the violent woman and the episode number and details about the crimes

she had committed in the space provided in the binder. I also began jotting down identifiable possible themes. Using thematic analysis, I was able to group themes relevant to the study and highlight specific words and phrases that would encapsulate discourses I was studying. This was time consuming and at the end of my second viewing each category had been filled.

Emerging Themes

Based on the literature on dominant discourses of women who kill, these themes – madness; victimisation; deviance along with agency – were considered during the analysis of the 13 episodes. Through an examination of the data, I quickly discovered the presentation of the women who kill on the show encompassed how every aspect of the show was presented: narration; perpetrator interviews; description of the victim and perpetrator by family, friends, colleagues, defense, and prosecutor; details of the crime and interviews with forensic psychologists. For example, I realised that Kristin Rossum in episode 11was not only labelled as a daredevil but also as "junkie". Initially, I had her categorised in the bad category which meant that Kristin would also have to be placed in the mad category because her murderous actions could be explained by her addiction to drugs.

I also realised that some words and terms were conveniently used and had to be connected to the dominant themes such as the use of the word "snapping" used by Clara's friend in episode 3 or the phrase "she was clearly out of her mind; delusional" used by Defence Counsel for Susan Wright in episode 10. When Clara's friend said that Clara "snapped" I had to locate within the data what exact meaning she attributed to "snapping." I found in this instance, that "snapping" for Clara was loss of control which allowed me to organise the mad discourse to include loss of control or irrational behaviour. This unusual behaviour however was said to be

inconsistent with behaviour she displayed throughout the course of her life as testified by her friends; colleagues; and the framing on the show. When Susan's attorney used the phrase "she was clearly out of her mind; delusional" during the trial to explain why Susan stabbed her husband over 100 times, I had to again find meaning or truth to what he said and what was presented on the show. My examination of the attorney's statement was found to be conjecture and did not match the evidence presented on the show, as is discussed in the following chapter.

The emerging themes that I initially identified were: murder; lesbianism; incest; hurt; choice; aggression; deviousness; lust; anger; financial gain; financial instability; domesticity; greed; manipulation; promiscuity; adultery; guilt; jealousy; revenge; selfishness; impulsiveness; substance abuse; scheming; lying; obsession; and mental illness.

Coding

My third viewing is when I delved into coding of themes. Coding is the process of transforming raw data into a standardized form (Babbie, 2020, p. 332). Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend reading through the entire data set at least once before beginning coding, as ideas and identification of possible patterns may be shaped as researchers become familiar with all aspects of their data. This viewing involved listening without any visuals (I turned the monitor around) so that my listening was not interrupted by glancing periodically at the television. According to Vandergrift (2004) "listening involves physiological and cognitive processes at different levels, as well as attention to 'contextual and socially coded acoustic clues' "(p. 4). While listening to the audio of the episodes, I added and highlighted descriptive phases to my binder that I believed matched the dominant discourses I was studying. In this thesis, these combined methods were used to provide a deeper understanding of the narratives presented of

the women who kill on *Snapped*. After the listening period was finished, I returned to the highlighted descriptors to conduct a closer examination of how female killers were presented in the series. Through coding I was able to reduce large amounts of data in this case, themes from this second (listening) viewing into manageable pieces of information. The coding also resulted in me asking more questions: 1. What was the power relations between the female killers and their spouses/lovers? 2. How did the women that participated in on-camera interviews present themselves? 3. Were their representations congruent with their framing in the series? Out of the 13 episodes, only five of the women agreed to be interviewed by producers for the show. I attempted to identify if the show framed the five women interviewed as being culpable in the crimes, if they were presented as contrite or if they were portrayed as unrepentant for the murders. While I was *Snapped* is an example of the true crime genre, I remained aware that the series borrows the shock value of RTV and is heavily edited to frame participants in particular (often sensational) ways

At the start of identifying themes, I had 26 themes at the end of the process I had eleven themes notwithstanding the recurring theme of murder I found: lesbianism; choice or agency; aggression; deviousness; greed; domesticity; scheming; mental illness; promiscuity and manipulation. Next, I was able to situate these themes within the corresponding discourses of the research. Mental illness, loss of control and substance abuse constituted mad discourse in the data. Manipulation, greed, scheming, promiscuity, deviance, and lesbianism organised around the bad discourse. Choice and aggression were organised around agency. While the sad discourse to explain women who kill is that they are usually victims of abuse, this discourse was not located as a theme.

During my fourth and final viewing I watched the season in its entirety, this time paying careful attention to the time stamp to pull out specific quotes I found representative of the themes discovered and the dominant discourses being studied. For example, quotes were garnered that presented women who kill as irrational or mad and/or rational and possessing agency in the plotting or execution of murder. Next, I went through my binder and put each *Snapped* woman into a category. With the one page (divided by penciled columns) in front of me, I looked over my notes again and soon began reading and re-shifting the women in some of the classifications. When I was satisfied, I placed an asterisk next to women who appeared in multiple categories. This rearrangement of data across all my categories resulted in each category of discourse having a minimum of two corresponding names albeit the sad category was void of anyone presented as a victim and thus this was the only mainstream discourse not represented in the dataset.

Chapter Five

Episode Overview

As a prelude to chapter six, my data analysis, I provide a synopsis of each of the thirteen episodes of the first season of *Snapped*.

Episode Synopsis

Celeste Beard Johnson (1001) after a failed marriage and the birth of twin daughters at a very young age, Celeste was determined to change her circumstances. Upon meeting millionaire media tycoon Steven Beard, a recent widower, her circumstances greatly improved. Celeste met Steven while working as a waitress at an Austin country club in Texas. Despite the more than forty-year age difference between them, Steven and Celeste wed. When Steve threatened to cut off her spending, Celeste threatened suicide and was admitted to a mental institution for treatment. There, Celeste met patient Tracy Tralton and the two became lovers. After their release, Celeste continued to see Tracy and eventually persuaded her to shoot her husband. After Steven's death, Tracy was arrested for his murder. Following Tracy's arrest and within six months of Steven's murder, Celeste met and married a younger man, bachelor Spencer Johnson. When Tracy stumbled upon their wedding announcement, she realised she had been manipulated and told authorities about Celeste's involvement in Steve's murder. In 2003, Celeste was sentenced to life in prison, with parole becoming available in 40 years.

Virginia Larzelere (1002) Virginia grew up poor in a trailer park in Florida. She was described as a driven woman who wanted more out of life than living in a farming town, a woman who used her sex appeal to prey upon unassuming men. After multiple marriages her days of financial struggles ended when she met and married unassuming dentist Norman Larzelere. Norman in fact, divorced his wife within weeks of meeting Virginia, and became her third husband and father to her teenage son and daughter. Norman had a thriving dentist practice in Deland, Florida and brought in Virginia work alongside him. During an afternoon in 1991, a masked gunman entered the dental office, shooting and killing Norman. The dental hygienist identified the shooter as Jason, Virginia's son. Virginia also saw the gunman but gave conflicting reports to police which made her look very suspicious and resulted in a police investigation into her personal life. The investigation revealed that Virginia was involved in several extra marital affairs; was peddling prescription drugs from the dental practice; and in a fraudulent scheme to pocket money from patients for services not rendered. When police visited the Larzelee home they got a break when they found that the caretaker, Steven Heidel, greatly resembled Jason. Heidel was interrogated about his involvement in Norman's murder. Heidel claimed that Virginia and Jason hired him to commit the murder. The housekeeper, Kristen Palmieri corroborated the details. Further investigation revealed that Virginia had taken out numerous life insurance policies, totalling up to $2 million dollars on her husband. Subsequently, Virginia and Jason were charged with the murder and received two separate trials. Jason was acquitted but Virginia was sentenced to death.

Clara Harris (1003) Born in Colombia and raised by her single mother after her father died when she was very young, Clara studied hard and eventually came to America where she met

David Harris, a recent divorcee with a young daughter, Lindsay. Clara and David soon married, and Clara helped David to rekindle the relationship with his daughter. David and Clara, both dentists, had a clear vision: to expand their practices and start a family. In 1998, Clara gave birth to twin boys; everything seemed to be going well at home and their dental practices were thriving. Clara found little time to spend with her husband due to the demands of her practice and motherhood, and David starting spending long hours at work. In 2001 he hired a new receptionist, Gail Bridges, and the two began an affair. Once David's employees told Clara about the affair, she confronted David. He admitted his infidelity but vowed to end the affair with Gail. Clara's contingency plan was to hire Blue Moon Investigators. When Clara checked in with the investigator and he revealed that her husband and Gail were at a hotel, Clara took Lindsay and headed to the hotel to confront David. Clara approached her husband and his mistress as they were exiting the hotel. She attacked Gail but David intervened, holding Clara's head to the pavement, to allow Gail to retreat to her car. When David exited the hotel, Clara repeatedly hit her husband with her car. Clara was accused of intentionally mowing down her husband and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Elena Kiejliches (1004) Elena never had a stable family unit until she started a relationship with Borys. Elena was born in Russia where she grew up very poor. Her mother was a drug addict, and her home life was very difficult until met millionaire Borys Kiejiliches. When they first met, Elena was 17 and Borys was 34. Elena referred to Borys as "my big teddy bear." The married Borys eventually left his wife and son to be with Elena and they immigrated to Brighton Beach, New York. In 1992, Elena gave birth to a son, and in 1994 the couple welcomed a daughter. As Borys' business kept him in Russia three weeks out of every month, Elena became lonely. When

the family returned from a planned Disney World vacation and there was no communication from Borys, Elena called the police and reported him missing. Police also received a phone call from a con man named Messiah Justice, who told authorities about a two-year affair he had been having with Elena. On April 25, Borys' lifeless body was found in a cardboard barrel floating in an inlet off Jamaica Bay. The Medical Examiner determined the cause of death to be a single gunshot to the back of the head. Messiah told police that Elena killed Borys and he helped to dispose of the body. Elena was sentenced to 22 years to life for the murder of her husband.

Kimberly Hricko (1005) Kim had a very difficult childhood; her parents divorced when she was a small child and her stepfather abused her. Having a family of her own was a dream for Kim, but she never imagined she would ever get married until friends introduced her to Steve. The sweethearts married and settled in the suburbs of middle-class Laurel, Maryland to raise their daughter, Anna. With her career as a surgical technician, Kim entered a new social circle and loved being around persons who also had high status. Steve, on the other hand, worked at a Country Club and was not impressed by Kim's new circle. As Kim and Steve's interests began to diverge, Kim discussed getting a divorce. Steve did not want to break-up his family, so he and Kim started marriage counselling. It was Steve's idea to do something special on Valentine's Day and he invited Kim to a murder mystery weekend. The first night's itinerary involved a dinner and the first mystery to be solved. After guests discovered who the killer was, the dining room was emptied as the guests retired for the evening. Employees at the resort reported that sometime after midnight Kim calmly walked into the lobby and said that her room was on fire. When employees arrived at the Hricko's cottage there was a strange odour in the air but no smoke or fire. Upon entering, Steve was found lying face up with beer cans and an open pack of

cigars nearby. He was dead. Kim would later be charged with Steve's murder and sentenced to life plus 30 years for arson in 1999.

Lee Ann Reidel (1006) Lee Ann was born in New York, the second of four children**.** After Lee Ann's parents divorced, her mother moved in with her lover, a woman, in Florida. Lee Ann eventually moved to Florida to live with her mother. At 19 years of age, she had a son, Christopher, and soon found love with bodybuilder Paul Reidel. The couple married in 1988 and soon welcomed a son, Nicholas, into the union. Paul ran a successful Long Island gym with his best friend, Alex Algeri, but was accused by Lee Ann of abusing cocaine. When the marriage became tumultuous Lee Ann separated from Paul, moving with the boys and thousands of dollars of Paul's money, to Florida to stay with her mother. There, Lee Ann met Ralph Salierno and hired him to kill Paul. She would later become pregnant by Ralph. While the bullet was intended for Paul, Alex, who resembled Paul in height and build and drove the same vehicle, was mistakenly shot to death outside of their Long Island gym**.** Once the murder plot was revealed Lee Ann was tried separately from Salierno and sentenced to 25 years to life.

Ruthann Aron (1007) after a humble beginning working in a small family restaurant in New York, Ruthann used hard work and her intelligence to get into Cornell University and, eventually, into the wealthiest county in America: Montgomery County in Maryland. As a rising star in the Maryland Republican Party, Ruthann had her sights on the Senate until shady real estate dealings contributed to her loss of the nomination. After her inability to secure the Senate nomination, Ruthann vowed revenge and hired a hit man to kill her husband, who wanted a divorce and Arthur Kahn, one of the two attorneys she blamed for her defeat. Ruthann contacted

William Mossberg, a landfill owner, to execute the murder plot. Mr. Mossberg contacted police who set up a sting operation. Ruthann was arrested and charged with solicitation to commit murder. During her first trial Ruthann's legal team argued that she was suffering from a mental disorder and was operating under diminished capacity. There was a mistrial. In the second trial, Ruthann pled no contest and was sentenced to 18-months in prison.

Joyce Lemay Cohen (1008) from her own account, Joyce describes her life as a fairy tale. However, her life did not start off glamorously. She moved around and lived with multiple foster families; she was abused; she had a failed marriage. Her Cinderella tale began when she headed to Miami, Florida where she encountered multi-millionaire and three-time divorcee, Stan Cohen. He was 17 years her senior. Joyce met Stan when she was hired to write mortgages for a construction company that he owned in Broward County. Six months after their initial meeting, Stan and Joyce eloped to Las Vegas. Joyce found herself in the lap of luxury; she had a private jet, took vacation ski trips, and enjoyed a party lifestyle inclusive of any illegal drug she wanted. Stan flew Joyce around the world, and they bought a home in Steamboat Springs, Colorado during one of their frequent ski trips there. While Stanley was spending most of his time working in Miami, Joyce had stayed in Colorado and was getting "wasted" on a regular basis. Stan did not approve. To lure Joyce away from Colorado, Stan bought Luccionis, a restaurant in Coconut Grove where Joyce became the hostess. It was not long after Joyce returned to Miami that her Cinderella story quickly became a nightmare: Stan was shot dead in the couple's Coral mansion and Joyce was fingered as the killer.

Diane Zamora (1009) Diane and David met at a Civil Air Patrol Club, a steppingstone for persons with military aspirations such as these high school students. As Diane had grown up with a father who was by all accounts a serial adulterer, Diane moved fast to cement her relationship with David. The couple planned their wedding five years after high school graduation and their respective Air Force Academy and Naval Academy graduations. Their future plans would go awry, however, after David violated their commitment to each other by cheating on Diane with is classmate, Adrianne. Feeling guilty, David confessed to Diane and Diane concluded that Adrianne would have to die to preserve their relationship. David had lured Adrianne out of her home for a drive to a secluded location where she met her demise. There were few leads in Adrianne's murder investigation until Diane shared events of Adrianne's murder with her roommates at the US Naval Academy. Authorities were contacted and Diane and David were tried separately for Adrienne's murder. David and Diane both received life sentences with the possibility of parole after each would have served 40 years behind bars.

Susan Wright (1010) Susan is a soft spoken, blonde and blue-seyed beauty accused of stabbing her husband Jeffrey to death. The couple were the parents of two small children and married for five years when Susan murdered Jeff. Susan, in a sex-game, tied Jeffrey to the bed and stabbed him nearly 200 times before burying him outside their bedroom. The following day Susan went to authorities to request a restraining order against him. Two days after Jeffrey's murder, Attorney Neal Davis visited the Sheriff's Office and told authorities that he had a new client and knew where to find Jeff Wright's body. Police went to the home where they found the couple's bed disassembled; carpet cut out and fresh paint on the wall above bed. They also found Jeff's body face down in a small area outside the couple's bedroom door. Susan was charged with

Jeff's murder. At trial, Susan maintained her innocence and claimed she acted in self defense against her husband who she alleged was abusive. Prosecutors provided details from Susan's past, including her history as a topless dancer. The jury convicted Susan of first-degree murder in the death of her husband and sentenced to her to 20 years.

Kristin Rossom (1011) Kristin lived a privileged life but rebelled in high school by taking crystal meth and methamphetamines. On a trip to Tijauana, Mexico in 1995, Kristin met Greg de Villers and they were rarely apart again. They married in 1999, after Kristin graduated summa cum laude with a degree in chemistry from the University of California; Greg graduated with a degree in Biology. On their wedding day, Greg said: "She was most incredible person I've ever met, and I just can't wait to spend the rest of my life with her." Kristin was hired as a toxicologist at San Diego's Medical Examiner's Office and Greg worked at a biotech lab. Kristin's began an affair with her married boos shortly after her own wedding. From the outside looking in, it appeared that Kristin and Greg had a promising future ahead. However, before their second anniversary, Greg was dead, and Kristin was accused of poisoning him and using her position at the M.E. Office to cover up the crime. Kristin was arrested and charged with Greg's murder. Her bond was set at $1.25 million which her parents took care off. Jurors took less than eight hours to find Kristin guilty and to sentence her to life without parole.

Debra Lynn Baker (1012) a wife of 28 years and mother of one son, no one ever spoke negatively about Debra in Wichita Falls, Texas. Debra established herself as a wife and mother and emphasised that she had embraced domesticity. Following the marriage of her best friend Lou Ann to millionaire businessman Jerry Sternadel, Debra went to work for him as his

accountant. Jerry operated his business from his ranch and needed a bookkeeper. He offered Debra a home on the ranch for herself and her family as an added incentive to work for him as he was very unpopular and not well liked in the town. He was also accused of being a womanizer and having an incestuous relationship with Lou Ann's daughter. Nevertheless, Debra accepted the position but when Jerry calculated that $30,000 was missing from the business account, he accused his wife and her best friend Debra of stealing from him. There were insinuations that Debra and Lou Ann were lovers and not just best friends. Before Jerry could resolve the matter, he was hospitalised and soon afterwards, he died. Debra was subsequently charged with murdering him with arsenic poison amid speculation that Lou Ann was the mastermind behind Jerry's murder.

Carolyn Warmus (1013) Millionaire Carolyn Warmus was accustomed to getting everything she wanted from her rich father who acquiesced to her every request because he never had time to spend with her. Her parents divorced when she was six years old, and she was never popular in school although she was beautiful and highly intelligent. After completing a Master's degree in Education, Carolyn secured her first job at an elementary school in New York. As a new teacher at Greenville Elementary, Carolyn initially found a mentor in co-worker and Physical Ed teacher, Paul Soloman, 17 years her senior. Soon Carolyn was having dinner at Paul's house with his wife Betty Jeanne and their young daughter Kristan, who Carolyn lavished with expensive gifts and frequent ski trips. Carolyn would fall in love with Paul and the two would begin a 12-month affair. Paul wanted to end the affair, but Carolyn was in love. She hired a private detective to follow Paul, and then she borrowed the P.I.'s gun to kill Paul's wife, Betty Jeanne. Paul discovered Betty Jeanne dead at their apartment with nine bullet wounds to her body. He became

the chief suspect until he revealed his affair with Carolyn to police. When questioned by police Carolyn expressed shock and refused to cooperate. Examining Carolyn's phone records, police noticed frequent calls to a local private investigator, Vincent Parko. Parko, in exchange for immunity, confessed that he sold Carolyn his gun and that she also got a silencer made for the gun. The gun was the caliber and type that forensics determined had killed Betty Jeanne. Carolyn was charged with murder and released on $250,000 bail, paid by her father. The trial was a media circus and attended by numerous celebrities. The jury could not reach a verdict and there was a hung jury in the first trial. In the second trial, Carolyn was found guilty of murder in the second degree and sentenced to 25 years to life with the possibility of parole.

Chapter Six

Analysis of Findings

In this chapter I offer my "reading" of *Snapped* by presenting the qualitative findings of my research. In my literature review I identified the dominant criminological discourses used to explain women who kill: pathologisation (mad), victimisation (sad) and deviance (bad). I also examined a less dominant discourse found in the literature: agency. My analysis thus explores how the narratives offered on *Snapped* appear to accept or reject these gendered stereotypes and asks whether the series offers room to consider the women in these real-life storylines as having agency.

Narratives are popular stories that contribute to the establishing of social constructions of things like crime; they contribute to the development of frames of understanding normally consisting of characteristics that the public is already familiar with (Surrette, 2011, p. 41). Consider the narrative of Mary Winkler. Mary was married to her preacher husband Matthew Winkler for 10 years and together they had three children. Mary shot and killed Matthew at the church's parsonage and family home in Tennessee before fleeing with her young daughters. Mary and her daughters were discovered in Alabama after an Amber Alert[16] was issued. At trial Mary testified that she killed her husband by accident and cited years of sexual and emotional abuse. Members of the public seemed to side with Mary because she was presented as a victim

[16] Amber Alert or Child Abduction Emergency (CAE code). AMBER is named after nine-year-old Amber Hagan who disappeared while riding her bike in Arlington, Texas, in 1996. Her lifeless body was found two days later. Police and the media collaborated to create the AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) Alert to find abducted kids (Newsweek, 2007).

who had suffered enough at the hands of a man who abused his role as a servant of God. The Criminal Justice System agreed; Mary was convicted of voluntary manslaughter in 2006 and sentenced to 210 days. Mary was credited for time served and released on probation (Candiotti & Dornin, 2007). Mary's narrative was featured in Season Six of *Snapped*. Rothenberg (2003) argues that American society, in a demonstration of public sympathy, accepted battered women's syndrome as a legitimate defence in instances of abuse (p.771). She reasons that while there was sympathy for the stories of women's victimisation, psychologist and movement advocate Lenore Walker's argument that domestic violence was grounded in the structural inequality of patriarchal society, was compelling argument (p.773). Rothenberg, in what she called the "cultural compromise" explanation for the public acceptance of battered women, argued:

> Cultural compromise, as the term is employed here, occurs as parties with conflicting interests attempt to gain cultural authority over a social issue. To gain this authority, overarching interpretations of a cultural issue must often accommodate competing understandings and address the concerns or interests of larger audiences. The result is often a partial gain for interested parties as portions of their goals are incorporated into the public understanding of the issue and accepted by the larger society. Yet at the same time, this compromise leads to dissatisfaction, as goals are not sufficiently met and no one party sees its understanding of the social problem fully realized (p.772)

As such, Mary benefitted from the public acceptance of the battered women's syndrome as evidenced by her light sentencing.

What does Mary Winkler's story tell us about social construction of gender and crime as it relates to the dominant criminological discourses to explain women who kill? First, we note that Mary's admittance of killing her husband is incongruent with the social and gender role expectations of women. As stated in chapter two, women who kill betray their role as life-givers with Jordan (1998) positing that a woman's nature is to nurture and not to annihilate. Empirical

work suggests that the discourses of pathologisation, victimisation, and deviance reflect a social construction of women who commit lethal violence which offers particular narrative strategies for understanding why women may stray from their traditional role. Secondly, Mary constructed herself as a victim of sexual and psychological abuse and this framing also excuses her of social deviance. Thirdly, through her description of her husband's death as an "accident" in which a faulty gun accidentally discharged, Mary is alleviated of the intent to kill -- devoid of any agency in the murder. In this narrative the idea that a woman's biological makeup means that she is incapable of killing remains uncontested. Fourth, as a result of the acceptance of Mary's framing of herself as a victim, her story garnered sympathy and resulted in her sentencing being less harsh. Morissey (2003) explains that apart from a denial of agency in mainstream constructions of women who commit violence, reinforcement of gendered stereotypes impacts the outcome of criminal trials. Unlike Mary, none of the women in my data framed themselves or were framed by others as victims, nor did my findings allow me to categorise them in the "sad" discourse of victimisation.

As a prelude to this chapter, I gave a synopsis of each of the thirteen episodes that comprise my data set. In my analysis, I begin with the discourse of pathologisation. I will present the episodes about "deadly women" which the show portrayed as mentally disordered when they committed or hired killer(s) to execute their murder plots. I will repeat this process for the remaining discourses giving detailed explanations as to why I placed each female killer within a specific category. It should be noted that some of the killers fit into more than one category, thus some overlap will occur. Further, there is one discourse that did not apply to any of the women on this season of *Snapped*.

Mad Women

As discussed in my literature review, the dominant discourse used to explain women who kill is pathologisation or madness (Africa, 2010, p. 80). The American Psychiatric Association categorises mental disorder as behaviour that is abnormal. Violence is considered a departure from normal behaviour and is regarded, within the diagnostic system, as a consequence of pathology (APA, 2000).[17] When women are violent, they are categorised as mad because they transgress their inherent nature, AS passivity and dependence ARE traits widely recognised as feminine (Burke, 2005, p. 126).

Madness is characterised by mental disorder, hysteria, irrationality, absence of reason and one not in control of one's senses (Lombroso & Ferrero, 1895 cited in Burke, 2005; Comack & Brickey, 2007; Gelsthorpe, 1989; Ussher, 1992). As noted earlier in this thesis, Lombroso and Ferrero were among the first to theorise women as inherently pathological, linking their criminality to their "primitive makeup." Sociologist Otto Pollak in 1950[18] proposed that hormonal imbalance during pregnancy was a cause of female criminality (Burke 2005) and Edwards (1988) noted that premenstrual tension was successfully used as a defence for murder. While, within this discursive formulation, a woman's behaviour is understood to be irrational and controlled by her body, men's behaviour even when violent/criminal is deemed rational and associated with the mind (Smart, 1995, p. 82).

In my research, I found that discourses of madness were easily identified and widely used to explain a number of tendencies exhibited by the women profiled on *Snapped* including

[17] Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is the widely accepted psychiatric diagnostic system for the United States and around the world.
[18] Otto Pollak in 1950 authored the Criminality of Women which is credited as one of many starting points for traditional theories of female criminology.

psychological disturbances, and loss of control. These were the characteristics I looked for when viewing the episodes. Of the 13 episodes in my data set, I identified the mad discourse in four: Clara Harris (1003) was represented as being out of control; Joyce Lemay Cohen (1008) and Kristin Rossum (1011) were represented as not being in control due to issues related to substance abuse, while Ruthann Aron (1007) was described as suffering from a psychological disorder.

She's out of control

The narrator presented Clara (1003) as a sympathetic figure whose actions were out of character due to emotional distress caused by her unfaithful husband. This sensitive disposition was underscored by interviews with Clara's friends. Ana Jones described her as someone who loved to entertain and an extremely organised and gracious individual. Paula Elsner said Clara was always smiling and a grateful person that never forgot her humble beginnings. The scenes before trial were full of snapshots of Clara smiling. Such descriptions and photos appeared to reposition Clara, the accused woman, as non-criminal.

In court, while there was footage of the trial, there was no audio of the proceedings, only narration given. Clara appeared to be an unassuming individual sitting at the defense table dressed for the most part, in two-piece suits. According to Dr. Dwayne Wolf, Medical Examiner, several teeth were knocked out of David's mouth; he also suffered six broken ribs; a broken collar bone; multiple fractures and his left lung essentially collapsed. Speaking about the incident Paula Elsner, (friend of Clara) said that Clara snapped. This statement suggests that Clara's violent behaviour on the evening of the incident was out of character and in conflict with the characterisation of someone described as organised and always in control. The sheer number of

hits, having a minor in the car who was the victim's daughter, both her friends and the narrator alluding to Clara losing control, all helped to frame Clara as mad.

When the footage of the actual incident was shown in court, Clara looked remorseful over David's death and was seen putting both hands over her face appearing to be sobbing. Further, when the verdict was read, footage from court showed Clara crying and through an interview with a reporter, it is learnt that many persons in the gallery also began audibly crying. Clara was convicted of sudden passion – an instantaneous explosion of violence[19] and sentenced to 20 years in prison. [20]

It should be noted that I refrained from using the term *murder* because as stated earlier, the narrator presented Clara as a considerate individual and apart from the charge of *murder* relayed to the viewer and specifying the "*Murder* Trial of Clara Harris" the narrator never used the word *murder* in reference to the crime.

The drugs made me do it

In Joyce Lemay Cohen and Kristin Rossum stories, (1007 and 1011) I recognised pathology through discussions of their substance abuse on the show which is suggested to have produced psychological disturbances. Joyce's drug of choice was cocaine and Kristin was addicted to methamphetamines.

Joyce participated in an on-camera interview from inside prison where she was shown walking between high barb wired fences in a prison blue dress. On camera her face was plain

[19] Texas Penal Code 19.02 defines sudden passion as passion directly caused by and arising out of provocation by the individual killed.

[20] Clara Harris was released on parole in 2018 after serving 15 years of her 20-year sentence. Clara's parole will end in February 2023.

except for lipstick, and her short hair was gray – a stark difference in appearance from photos shown of her having nicely coifed hair and wearing fur coats, makeup and lots of jewellery. Joyce described her life with Stan as a fairy tale, “To me it was a Cinderella story because of where I came from,” she said.

Joyce’s rags to riches story was short-lived. Following the murder of her husband Stan, his children froze his assets and Joyce had to live in a trailer while the homicide was investigated. “I really didn’t have any money to live after they (Stan’s children) went to the judge and got everything frozen,” she said. According to Joyce’s account of the murder, she heard glass breaking and realised that someone had broken into the home, and she only saw the person running out of the door. It sounded like they said, “Let’s get the f--- out of here.”

In court, Prosecutors painted Joyce as a “gold-digging, drug crazed murderess.” Authorities said Joyce’s friends liked to use drugs and that she had a cocaine problem which Stan discovered and as a result threatened to divorce her. The episode framed Joyce as a cocaine addict; the story *Snapped* offered suggests that her usage resulted in a stimulant disorder and consequently damaged her mentally. In her mentally altered state, the show’s narrator alleged that Joyce hired hit men to murder Stan so she could continue her expensive drug habit with his money. While on camera Joyce never commented on the substance abuse allegation, she did respond on camera to the Prosecution’s motive of her killing her husband for money. “I’m not stupid,” Joyce said, “I knew that if my husband and I divorced I would get money.”

While there were no re-enactments of the crime, footage from the court were shown. It was interesting that when Joyce’s accuser, Frank Zuccarello (one of the hit men) was testifying on the witness stand that she looked emotionless and just stared at him from the defendant’s seat. And although Joyce was framed as lucid in her interview with *Snapped* producers, her answers

posited her as unrepentant and selfish – she never expressed any feeling about Stan being dead but only lamented about her imprisonment and of that being a miscarriage of justice. Said Joyce, "I'm very hopeful that the judge will see all of the deception and manipulations that went on; the withholding of information that could have helped me at the trial; the use of false and perjured testimony. I have to believe that someone is going to look at this some time and say, "you can't convict a person on this [starts crying]."

Unlike Joyce, Kristin Rossum (1011) had a privileged upbringing. Kristin was a child model and ballerina: both of her parents were college professors. According to Dr. James Murray, Forensic Psychologist, she was raised in a community where status and power were important and these [attributes] the narrator said were promoted by her parents who also had Kristin perform and train in the theatre. Dr. Helen Smith, Forensic Psychologist said that Kristin had a great deal of pressure to be perfect. The series narrator labeled her as "impulsive and gutsy" and one that "loved anything with a touch of danger" while her ex-boyfriend described Kristin as "always into doing something with an adrenaline rush." These characterisations juxtapose the perfect, studious rich girl image and present to the viewer a daredevil who would not be afraid of trying anything including drugs. These characterisations however do not paint the picture of someone with a murderous intent.

When Greg was found dead lying on the floor of the couple's bedroom covered in rose petals, Kristin told authorities that their marriage was on the rocks and that she had informed Greg only that morning that she was leaving him. According to her testimony, Greg was very depressed by the news and his death was initially ruled a suicide by the San Diego Medical Examiner's Office. Immediately following Greg's death, Kristin authorised his eyes and other organs to be donated and the rest of his body to be cremated. Within 24 hours however, Greg's

family filed an injunction to stop the cremation and asked for an independent autopsy to be conducted. The new autopsy revealed that Greg had died from an overdose of the drug fentanyl and his case was ruled a homicide.

With the new findings, Kristin was called in for questioning by police. Seasoned law enforcement officials realised that Kristin was abusing illegal drugs immediately from an assessment of her appearance and behaviour. Laurie Agnew, Homicide Detective said, "When I walked her up and really was kind of watching her appearance and movement, my first thought was this is a doper. I knew I was looking at someone that was a meth user." Footage of the interrogation showed a dishevelled Kristin – dressed in droopy looking sweats, knees bent up to her face, rubbing of her face and then resting her face on her bent knees. Kristin's Defense Attorney Alex Loebig, described meth as one of the scariest drugs that produces paranoia, makes one act aggressive and clouds one judgment all of which point to a state of *mad*ness. From the start, the narrator was foreshadowing, using terms to describe Kristin such as her "wanting a touch of danger," "impulsive," "always lived life on the edge" to reach the climax of Kristin admitting to authorities that she was a meth addict and that her addiction began in high school. It was also revealed by law enforcement that Kristin stole drugs including meth for her personal use from the Medical Examiner's office where she worked. Kristin fit into the *mad* discourse as she was acting without reason because she was being controlled by drugs.

When Kristin was charged with Greg's murder, it was the first time that Kristin was shown sobbing and the first time she was shown dressed in a blue jail uniform. As footage was not allowed in the court, there were only recordings of Kristin headed into court. Walking into court, Kristin had a serious face, walked confidently, and donned a preppy look: shoulder bag, sweater over long sleeved blouse, and mini skirt. Her mother and father walked on either side of

her. Kristin's lawyer explained that the verdict would be based on the believability of Kristin's testimony. The narrator said Kristin in her testimony came across as a liar. Her ex-boyfriend called Kristin an "incredible liar" stating that she believed her own lies. Kristin was subsequently charged with first degree murder and sentenced to life without parole.

It's a mental illness

Ruthann Aron (1007) was described as a well-dressed and polished woman with lofty goals. The series' framing suggested that she was the antithesis of someone who would plot a murder for hire but someone who was unforgiving. She was diagnosed by both medical experts, Forensic Psychologists Dr. Helen Smith and Dr. James Murray, as a "pathological narcissist". Narcissism is categorised as a personality disorder (Black & Grant, 2014, p. 400). Pathological narcissism is driven by an intense /need for admiration and recognition, combined with a difficulty regulating these needs, (Roche et. al 2013). Dr. Smith argues that "These types of women with narcissistic tendencies tend to be drawn towards and only drawn towards those people who have high status and who could make them look good." Black & Grant (2014) identifies this belief of being so special and unique that you can only be understood and associated with other high-status people as a criterion for narcissistic personality disorder.

Ruthann grew up in a working-class family in New York that struggled to make ends meet; she worked hard in the family's small restaurant until she went to college. Ruthann married her college sweetheart Barry Aron after he completed medical school. Together they raised two children in the affluent suburbs of Washington, D.C. Ruthann and her husband spent a lot of time on the social scene. During Ruthann's spare time she began to buy distressed properties and started her own development company.

While she was successful at this venture, she also wanted to make a name for herself in politics. Dr. Smith states: “Politics really is a wide-open candy store for pathological narcissism because each vote is often taken as an indication that somebody out there loves you, admires you, likes you and wants to give you their vote.” Ruthann’s political career began with an appointment to the Planning Board which was the most influential agency in the city. Next was getting a Senate nomination but she lost her bid for the Senate Republican ticket when fraudulent dealings in her development company were revealed to her opponent. Ruthann lost, and blamed lawyer Arthur Khan who testified against her and her husband for asking for a divorce. Ruthann’s plan to hire a hit man to kill both men is illustrative of another criterion of a narcissistic personality: one who does not have empathy for others and cannot identify with the needs or feelings of others (Black & Grant, 2014, p. 400). As Dr. Murray explains: “When you attack a pathological narcissist you don’t just hurt their feelings, you threaten to take away the defensive shell that they’ve built around this core sense of themselves so the reaction can be quite dramatic, quite sudden, quite unexpected and in some cases quite violent.”

Ruthann was arrested for solicitation to murder after the landfill owner she tried to hire for the “hit,” contacted police. There were no cameras allowed in the courtroom but there were cameras outside and sketches of the daily happenings. If one had not known the identity of Ruthann before her arrest and based on description of being a well-dressed woman, she would not have been recognizable when she arrived at court. No longer did she appear as the woman on the campaign trail with fashionable attire, makeup and hair professionally styled. Instead, Ruthann wore no makeup, no earrings, was dressed in frumpy sweaters and had a slow walk into the courtroom. Apart from medical experts on the show diagnosing her as narcissistic, Ruthann’s defense attorney during the trial argued “she was crazy when she did it [hired a hit man].” She fit

the part. While in court Ruthann reportedly held tissue in her hand and continually rocked back and forth while she sat at the defendant's table. To reinforce Ruthann's individual pathology the episode noted that defense medical practitioners also diagnosed her with bipolar disorder. Again, her diagnosis presented on the show as one with a personality disorder, which places Ruthann within this mad discourse.

Bad Women

The word "bad" by definition means something that is not good in any manner (Bad, n.d.) "[B]ad' women are cold, selfish and are 'non-women' or masculine or even monsters" (Frignon 1995, p. 34). In the literature review chapter, I explained that bad women are classified into a number of sub-categories with two groups being relevant here: women who kill and exhibit sexual deviance and women who kill due to early exposure to violence as children.

I identified the bad woman discourse in eight of the thirteen episodes screened. Out of this eight, I identified seven episodes where the female murderers were also shown to have demonstrated some form of "sexual deviance." I found that "bad" in these episodes was discursively organised through tropes of scheming, deviousness, adultery, promiscuity, lesbianism, as well as through the suggestion that these bad female killers were products of bad environments. Seven of the women were consistently framed as manipulative; two were framed as pathologically abnormal because of their involvement in lesbian relationships; four of women were identified as coming from environments of poverty with two of them from abject poverty and abandonment.

Pathologically abnormal

Women's crime is inextricably linked to their sexuality: sexuality is considered by many to be the catalyst of female criminal behaviour (Klein, 1994, p. 267). According to Seal (2010) sexual propriety in terms of chasteness and monogamy is a desirable characteristic of normative femininity (p. 64) therefore women are likely to be viewed as sexually deviant if they are promiscuous or even adventurous in bed. Further linked to this idea of appropriate sexual behaviour by women, is the connected idea that all women should be heterosexual and if they are not, they are labelled as "pathologically abnormal" (Seal, 2010, p. 107). In the dataset I found the bad discourse manifesting through references to lesbianism in the stories of Celeste Beard Johnson (1001) and Debra Lynn Baker (1012).

In the series' pilot, Celeste Beard Johnson (1001) was framed as a manipulative woman who was involved in a lesbian affair and one who had an insatiable greed that could never be satisfied. The Prosecutor said she was given millions by her wealthy husband Steve Beard when he married her but she still wanted more because she always wanted more. Steve's friends said they recognised that his marriage to Celeste was a mistake. Another compared Celeste to Imelda Marcus stating that he walked into Celeste's closet once and that there had to be over 1,000 pairs of shoes. Yet another of Steve's friends called her a heartless gold digger. It was Celeste's addiction to shopping that prompted Steve to threaten divorce if she did not curb her expensive habit. Reportedly Celeste purchased luxury cars in the same manner an ordinary shopper purchased chocolates. Celeste in turn threatened suicide and was admitted to a mental care facility for a short period. "It became a new vice," said Celeste, "When I was depressed or upset, I would go shopping." Celeste spoke from behind bars dressed in white clothes, no makeup and hair pulled back in a ponytail.

Celeste met Tracy Tarlton at the mental care facility and the two women stayed in contact upon their release. “I felt a kinship to her,” said Celeste, “I could talk to her and not feel bad and somehow she knew what I was talking about.” According to the narrator the two women had an immediate and intense bond. Gary Cobb, Assistant District Attorney said Tracey was open about being a lesbian and believed that Celeste had lesbian love for her. Tracey later admitted to shooting Steve but testified that like Steve, she too was manipulated by Celeste.

Overt sexuality and lesbianism were stressed because, historically, criminology has theorised LGBTQ people as sexually deviant (Woods, 2014b). I read the show’s pathologising of lesbianism as a way to place Celeste and Tracey in a male gendered space, as suggesting that when women exhibit violence it can be understood as male behaviour. It should be reiterated that this is the first season of *Snapped* and the treatment of sexual orientation would probably be different in current episodes.

Celeste looked stunned in her police booking photos. Unlike photographs throughout the episode that showed a well-dressed, curly hair, smiling Celeste, court snapshots showed an unassuming Celeste without makeup, jewellery, wearing glasses and wearing a headband on top of straight hair. When the jury returned with a guilty verdict a freeze frame of Celeste crying in court was shown. Reportedly, Celeste’s twins, Jennifer and Kristina sealed their mother’s fate when they testified against her. Of their testimony, Celeste said, “I want to call them the Menendez sisters. It just breaks my heart that the two people I love more than anything else in this world, would do this to me”

In my assessment of how Celeste was presented on the show, I interpreted her narrative as someone that had no culpability for her husband’s murder and was also unapologetic. In her own words she said, “I will never apologize for Steve’s murder when I had nothing to do with it”

(wipes a tear). “And I just hope that Dick [lawyer] wins my appeal because I know in my heart that if we get a second chance at a trial, then I’ll be found not guilty”

This episode also framed Celeste as following a pattern of calculated planning to get what she wanted, which also suggested that she was bad. First, when she wanted stability and financial security for the first time in her life, Celeste sought out a job at a country club where she knew there would be a high probability of becoming the paramour of a mature rich man – it worked, millionaire media tycoon Steve married her. Second, Celeste got tired of being married to a much older man, she engaged in an ongoing relationship with Tracey and convinced her to shoot her husband. Tracey did shoot him but Steve did not die right away. Third, she pretended to be the dutiful wife who was nursing Steve back to health after his shooting incident. Instead of tending to the stomach wound, Celeste packed the wound with dirt for Steve to develop an infection and die – Steve died within a week of being in his wife’s nursing care.

While Debra Lynn Baker in episode twelve and best friend Lou Ann Sternadel were characterised as lovers, the framing of Debra unlike Celeste in episode one, highlighted lesbianism as a way of explaining the murder of Jerry Sternadel. And unlike Celeste, Debra’s normative femininity trait of domesticity was stressed. Debra in fact was posited as the quintessential woman – married to her high school sweetheart for 28 years, mother to a son that was a high school football player and a stay-at-home mother. “All I wanted was to be married and to be a good mother, never career minded,” said Debra speaking from inside prison on a direct connect mounted two-way telephone. Debra and her family were also framed as persons that everyone loved as opposed to the murder victim, Jerry Sternadel, the millionaire plumber, who according to the narrative no one in the Texas town liked. “Everyone had a story about Jerry and it was bad,” the narrator said. He was described as a “horse’s rear; womanizer who allegedly

slept with his stepdaughter and someone that no one in the county cared about. Even his own daughter and ex-wife confirmed that no one ever crossed Jerry and that he liked to instill fear in people.

When Debra was charged with the intentional lethal poisoning of Jerry, according to the narration, many in the county believed that Lou Ann was involved and that the likeable Debra who was referred to as "Debbie", was not. A teary-eyed Debra, dressed in white prison uniform with graying long hair, looked more like a grandma with a warm face than a killer during her interview. And while she was very lucid in her answers she did not speak ill of the victim as others had and said only that Jerry was "extremely hard on his family and kids, stepchildren and workers." When she spoke of her alleged lover Lou Ann, she called her a very sweet person. The show alluded to Debra being "especially close" to Lou Ann but fell short of calling the women lovers; others on the show also insinuated that they were lovers. One of Jerry's friends said he interrupted what he believed to be an intimate moment between Debra and Lou Ann, when Debra answered the door buttoning her blouse. He said that only Debra and Lou Ann were in room at the time. Tambra Holcomb, Stable Hand for Jerry said, "They were very, very close. Closer than sisters." Debra in her on camera interview shrugged off the allegations explaining that because the office was at Jerry's house, she was with Lou Ann five days out of the week.

At the trial, Debra's long tresses were pulled in one and she was dressed in light coloured skirt suits. There was minimal footage showed of the trial, no audio, but narration. The prosecution painted Jerry as being a victim of hate and greed – his wife hated him and only wanted his money and his employee Debra hated him and wanted his money – so the two women who the prosecution said were in an intimate relationship, decided to get rid of Jerry for good.

The defense on the other hand put the victim on trial and brought in a cadre of witnesses to establish that Jerry was not liked by almost anyone in the community. It took only five hours of deliberation to find Debra guilty. Immediately, her husband and son came to her side to console a crying Debra. The next day at sentencing, the likeable "Debbie" sat rapidly blinking her eyes with her elbows bent up to her face with hands closed in almost a prayer form, received the sentence of 10 years' probation[21] plus a $10,000 fine and immediately again, Debra was embraced by her son and her husband. *Snapped* continued to show that Debra was a part of a normal nuclear family – mother and father and child – and was a loved member of the family and this reasserting of Debra's identity, as a wife and mother in the series, reclaimed Debra's femininity. "It's frightening that two women, who people don't like to think can commit murder, could join together and plan and commit a murder," said Dr. James Murray, Forensic Psychologist. "One gets a minimal sentence, and one gets off scot free."

It appears that Celeste was punished with life imprisonment, not only for her crime, but also for being a lesbian and for transgressing gender norms: Debra, in comparison, received a pass with a 10-year probation sentence, despite testimony that she was in a lesbian relationship with Lou Ann. My analysis suggests that lesbianism was constructed as an aberrant form of sexuality in Celeste's story because her husband was well-respected: her direct involvement in his murder created further distance between Celeste and other, "normal" women.

On the other hand, while lesbianism was not taken into account in Debra's trial and verdict, my reading of how the show framed Debra, suggests that she was capable of rehabilitation once she returned to her domesticated life with her husband and son. Debra was a

[21] Debra Lynn Baker was imprisoned for violating her probation.

part of "normal" womanhood – she was married to one man for over two decades and together they raised one son and the entire family was loved in the community. In fact, Seal (2010) would describe Debra as a "respectable woman" whereby notions of respectability are tied to a woman's moral worth (p. 63). Debra was therefore depicted as being capable of regaining her heterosexual normal life and this possibility made her less *bad* and more accepted than Celeste. Whereas Celeste had no form of domesticity to regain – she was a divorcee; she became a mother to twin daughters at a young age; she abandoned her twins for a time leaving them with her ex-husband; she was on her third marriage and manipulated her lesbian lover to shoot her husband before killing him herself – her way of life was uncharacteristic of a "normal" woman.

Marital sex and "bad" intentions

I identified the bad discourse emerging in relation to sexual deviance depicted in episodes of season one which I studied. In one case, Susan Wright (1010) was represented as sexually adventurous and conniving; in the five other cases the murderous women had engaged in adultery – Virginia Larzelere (1002); Elena Kiejliches (1004); Kimberley Hricko (1005); Lee Ann Reidel (1006); Kristin Rossum (1011). Deviousness and greed were coupled representations of these women as sexually deviant in most of these stories.

I identified Susan Wright's story (1010) within the bad discourse because she was portrayed on the show as a non-conformist and one who resisted feminine ideals of passivity and gentleness (MacDonald 1996; Morissey 2003). Susan had worked as a topless dancer, and this helped the series frame her as refusing a normative adult female lifestyle. Instead, Susan was represented as the aggressor in the marital bed, as deviously killing her husband during sex then scheming to fabricate a story about being a battered wife. While Susan was presented as bad by

the Prosecutor, she was in some ways romanticised by the series. There was continual mention of her beauty; she was described as being pretty, having a sweet face; being an excellent housewife – she was said to be able to cook a three-course meal in 20 minutes; and soft spoken.

Susan's interview was conducted at the prison where she was sentenced to 25 years for her husband's murder. A glass partition separated the interviewer and Susan who used a two-way direct connect phone system to speak. She was dressed in a white prison uniform and her hair pulled back in a ponytail with a side bang. Susan sounded cheery and was soft-spoken. If one was viewing for the first time and saw Susan behind bars, looking demure and smiling, speaking ever so softly, one would not connect her to her husband's murder or any homicide in fact.

The Prosecution however did directly connect Susan to Jeff's fatal stabbing. Footage of Susan's testimony during her trial showed her crying while in the witness box. During her testimony she could not explain away Jeff's two defensive wounds. The narrative created by the Prosecution was that Susan, under the pretence of a sex game, fatally stabbed Jeff before she disposed of his body in the backyard. The episode suggests that Susan positioned herself in the male role within their relationship by being the aggressor in the marital bed. This of course contrasted Susan's claim that she was an unassuming housewife who was abused by a husband that was in charge of every aspect of their married union. In my discussion on the bad discourse, above, I noted that sexually deviant women are those that are not only promiscuous but also sexually adventurous. When Susan positioned herself on "top", as being the dominant sexual partner in the relationship, Jeff then became subservient to her as he was tied to the bed, and this was symbolic of him rendering his power and authority. Becoming subservient to his wife was evidenced by the Prosecution's re-enactment Jeff's murder. Up to this point there was no audio,

only video and narration, but both audio and footage was shown when Kelly Siegler, the Prosecutor, brought Wright's actual bloodstained bed into the court. Siegler bound her assistant by tying his wrists with neckties to the bed post before straddling him. Once Siegler straddled him she re-enacted the 193 times that Susan stabbed Jeff. As the re-enactment by the Prosecutor was shown, again with no audio, Susan hung her head down, but the point was made that Jeff's murder was overkill. To reiterate the number of stab wounds the Prosecution also showed the actual photo of Jeff on the autopsy table with the multiple stab wounds that resembled huge bee stings across his body that begun at the top of his head. "People were shocked", said Jessica Willey, a TV reporter, "People couldn't imagine a pretty lil thing stabbing her husband 193 times." Referring to the re-enactment of the murder in court Susan appeared insulted during her interview. "That wasn't in our relationship at all," she said slightly turning her head and laughing nervously, "I think it's disgusting."

Kelly Siegler, the Prosecutor took note that Susan appeared offended in court by the re-enactment and in her interview with *Snapped* said, "She acted just so, so offended, like how dare I suggest that she would basically do anything besides regular, boring, missionary sex and it was like come on lady, you have handcuffs in the drawer," said Seigler. Susan's reaction is an illustration of the framing that Susan wanted to portray to the public – a domesticated, soft spoken, demure woman that ONLY transgressed the normative femininity role when she stabbed her husband to death. Susan[22] was sentenced to 25 years for second degree murder.

[22] Susan had her prison sentence reduced from 25 years to 20 years in November 2020. In December 2020, she was released on parole.

Promiscuity as bad

When Virginia Larzelere (1002) married rich dentist, Norman Larzelere, her socioeconomic status changed from poverty to wealth. As Norman's wife, Virginia experienced all the trappings of wealth including – living in a mansion; driving luxury cars; owning vacation homes, private boats and a plane. The narrative about Virginia, who was sentenced to death for the murder-for-hire killing of her husband, was not good. She was presented by the show as a rule breaker who did everything wrong – initiated an insurance fraud at the dental practice (greed); engaged in multiple affairs (an adulterer); wrote and sold prescriptions to patients (a drug dealer). Her greed also led her to acquire life insurance policies on Norman that had a payout totalling more than $2 million. Following Norman's murder Virginia and her son Jason were charged with first degree murder. Both turned themselves in to authorities. Footage from Virginia's formal arraignment showed her in the jail's orange jumpsuit. Virginia remained incarcerated until trial as the state of Florida is a no bond state.

Producers used vignettes of the crime scene which showed the lifeless body of Norman laying face up with blood across his chest from the bullet wound. The Prosecution claimed that using sex to get what she wanted was a modus operandi for Virginia and that she had used that ploy on her own son to get him to kill Norman. The show framed Virginia as having a sexual relationship with her son, Jason. Footage of the trial showed Virginia at times turning and smiling with persons in the gallery and always dressed nicely with adorning pearls. During the trial Virginia always appeared upbeat with a smile and gave the impression that the jury would return a not guilty verdict. It was not until the verdict was reached where footage including audio

of the actual verdict was played, was the first time Virginia[23] stopped smiling, and swallowed hard.

Deviousness in the fraud scheme at the dental office, scheming and planning to kill Norman and sexual relations with her son and multiple extramarital affairs all posited Virginia as bad. Virginia was someone who kept "upping the ante" for each instance. Dr. Helen Smith, Forensic Psychologist said, "A woman like Virginia is never satisfied with getting away with something. They have to keep getting away with something bigger and bigger."

Consider the depiction of Russian born Elena Kiejliches (1004) who migrated to the United States with her millionaire husband Borys. The Prosecution described Elena as an "immoral cheating gold digger" during the trial for her husband's murder. The viewer met a plain face Elena, dressed in white prison garbs. While Elena during her on camera interview sounded very lucid, she did speak with a medium and sometimes heavy Russian accent. Talking about Borys elicited a broad smile from Elena as she said, "I never met a man like this in my life."

Elena was also open about her affair with Messiah Justice, who implicated her in the murder of her husband. She said she was lonely when she met Messiah due to Borys' frequent business trips to Russia. Police identified Messiah as a con artist. Said Elena, "I closed my eyes and everything and I just wanted to hop that guy [Messiah]." The narrative revealed that Elena slept with Messiah with her young children at home and that the young children knew Messiah was their mother's boyfriend because he stayed at their home when their father was out of the

[23] Virginia's death sentence was commuted to life in 2008 partly because of unethical practices of her attorney.

country. Because Elena was promiscuous, she was represented as bad because traditional views of women in society do not consider it appropriate for women to engage in extra marital affairs.

When Borys' body was found in a cardboard barrel, Messiah reported to police that Elena had killed her husband and asked him to help dispose of the body. Elena said the only person to profit from her husband's death was Messiah as she would be in financial ruin without financial support from Borys. Said Elena, "Borys was the actual treasure I needed because without him there would be no money, no good life, it wouldn't be no father for my kids." Elena's retort was that Messiah realised she told Borys about their affair and he became scared because "my husband was very powerful man, and he would destroy him." Elena was arrested and charged with her husband's murder.

While there was no footage inside the trial, there was narration and footage of Elena's arrival to the courthouse. Unlike the glamorous appearance in photographs shown of Elena throughout the episode, Elena arrived at the court without makeup and wore glasses and business attire. Elena did not testify in her trial and was found guilty. "Guilty," said Elena of the verdict, "I was like in a dream, guilty" as she shrugged her shoulders in what demonstrated her being resigned to her fate of 22 years to life. Elena's adultery which was not hidden from her young children compounded with the fact that she was presented as the cold-blooded killer of a man [her husband] who did nothing wrong – he did not abuse her or cheat on her; he only gave her the best life possible – further separated Elena from normative femininity and positioned her within the bad discourse.

Kimberly Hricko (1005) was introduced as the person that everyone loved, especially her husband Steve. She was described as being appreciative, as having a bubbly personality, and being in one word: awesome. And it was her friends that matched Kimberly with her husband

whom many described as a gentle giant. The two married and had a daughter and settled in Laurel, Maryland. *Snapped* producers called it the seven-year itch as the couple started to drift apart after seven years of marriage. According to the show Kimberly was desirous of a divorce but Steve did not and planned a Valentine's Day getaway weekend at a murder mystery event for the two of them. It was at the weekend getaway that Steve met his demise. Kimberly had a small circle of her closest friends that she shared everything with, including her plans to kill Steve and get away with murder. Kimberly's friends relayed to law enforcement her murderous plot after learning of Steve's death, including her affair that resulted in Kimberly's arrest and charge for first degree murder and arson.

There were no recording devices allowed in the court, but video footage showed when Kimberly arrived at court in a jail bus having been held in jail without bail. She wore a blue long sleeve top and gray loose pants; her hands were cuffed at front. The narrative was that Steve's killing was premeditated. The argument was that Kimberly put a lot of thought and planning into his murder; she stole dosage of the lethal drug succinylcholine from work and took out a hefty life insurance policy on her husband. This scheming is one of the themes listed earlier in women who are categorised in the bad discourse.

As the case against Kimberly was based mostly on circumstantial evidence, the series narrator said the testimony of her closest friends, including her best friend, sealed her fate of a guilty verdict. A friend of Kimberly said while she and others testified on the witness stand, Kimberly who was described as stoic in court, "flipped the bird" at them and had to be warned by the judge that she would be removed before she would stop. Kimberly was convicted of first

degree murder and sentenced to life and an additional thirty years for first degree arson. After the sentencing Kimberly walked out of the court with her head down and looked downtrodden as she entered the awaiting prison bus where she then sat up and crossed her legs.

Due to the show's framing of Kimberly, specifically the "flipping of the bird" in court and the scene shown of her inside the prison bus with legs crossed, reinforces the analysis of Kimberly fitting into the bad discourse. Her actions also depicted someone who was disappointed in the guilty verdict. The show's narrative implied that had Kimberly not discussed her plans with friends to kill Steve, she would have gotten away with murder.

Lee Ann Reidel (1006) was labelled as cunning and manipulative by prosecutors and the mastermind behind the murder plot to kill her husband Paul, whose best friend and business partner Alex Algeri in a tragic case of mistaken identity, was killed. The Prosecution said Lee Ann persuaded her lover Ralph "Rocco" Salierno to carry out the murder and argued that the motive behind her wanting Paul dead was greed. The prosecution tried Lee Ann and Rocco together with two separate juries. The show did not present footage of the court proceedings, or footage of Lee Ann's arrival to court. The episode only showed snapshots of Lee Ann with Paul on their wedding day, of their baby and individual photos of each of them.

Earlier in this chapter I said bad women were categorised by a number of behaviours, including scheming, deceitfulness, and adultery and the show made Lee Ann appear bad by highlighting these same behaviour traits. First, the episode stressed Lee Ann's initial move to Florida when she left Paul and took the children, that she also stole thousands of dollars of Paul's money. Her theft can only be viewed as deviant behaviour. Second, while separation from married partners may present an occasion for some to have extra marital affairs, Lee Ann never

ended her affair. Paul on the premise that they were reunited, travelled back and forth between New York and Florida to be with this family. The show further emphasised Lee Ann's scheming by revealing that Lee Ann saw an opportunity to continue her love affair with Rocco by getting rid of her husband in New York and being thousands of miles away in Florida so it would appear that she was not involved in the murder. Third, Lee Ann's affair with Rocco led to her becoming pregnant with his child but she lied to her husband Paul and let him wrongly believe that he was the father. They both discussed naming the baby "Paul Jr". Lee Ann engaged in adultery and her continual actions were deceitful and she was portrayed as scheming. Fourth, Rocco revealed to police that the murder was Lee Ann's idea. All these examples posit Lee Ann as bad. One of the main witnesses told the court that he was present when Lee Ann confronted Rocco about killing the wrong man. The witness said Lee Ann argued with Rocco and said "You stupid ass! You killed the wrong guy." Further, the many witnesses for the Prosecution of whom her lawyer branded as "drug dealers, murderers, liars, and thieves," were all connected to Lee Ann.

As a viewer, it was hard to reconcile why a mother and wife who claimed innocence, would be connected to so many persons with rap sheets, including her boyfriend, if she was not complicit in law-breaking herself. It was even harder to reconcile that a jury of her peers believed the testimonies of who her lawyer called criminals, over Lee Ann's claim of innocence. Lee Ann's disruption of being a nurturer and being a passive woman all work together to position her as bad and she was sentenced to 25 years to life.

Early violence creates predisposition to commit violence

Women's acts of violence have also been explained as deviant for having an early predisposition to bad environments. I created a subgroup for Joyce Cohen (1008), Elena Kiejliches (1104), and Kimberley Hricko (1005), because of their early exposure to violence as children. While Joyce's (1008) storyline did not frame her as being sexually immoral, I placed her and added Virginia Lazerlere (1002); Elena Kejliches (1004) along with Kimberly Hricko (1005) in this discursive category because of structural factors or the ways in which their gendered lives were presented that may have accounted for their murderous actions. The structural disadvantages early in life that I looked for in the data set were poverty, abuse and neglect. In the literature, Africa (2010) explains that a woman may be predisposed to violence when structural factors such as family unit and location, economic marginalisation, position in society, and race, among other things, interact to provide a context that accounts for deviant women.

The show highlighted that Joyce, Virginia, and Elena all experienced high level of socio-economic disadvantages – they were all poor. Joyce was introduced as having come from "rock bottom" to a life of luxury, complete with a Jaguar SK; personal private jet; and vacation homes; after she married her multi-millionaire contractor husband. Virginia was raised in a trailer park in a rural farm community before she met and married her wealthy dentist husband; and Elena was born to a drug addicted mother in Russia and lived in poverty until she met and married her husband. All three of these women were marginalised in society because of their poverty. Joyce in comparing her childhood to life after marriage to Stan called it a "Cinderalla story." Elena had "more money that she could spend" as she explained "money was no object ever" [after marrying Borys]. While Virginia was described on the show as very driven, she was also

depicted as a woman who used her sexuality or rather bartered sexual acts with men to escape poverty. Steffensmeier and Haynie (2000) in their study of large US cities found that high levels of socio-economic disadvantage were positively linked to high homicide rates. Therefore, the initial start in life for Joyce, Virginia and Elena may explain why these women engaged in lethal violence.

Existing qualitative evidence puts forward that traumatic childhood experiences such as maltreatment[24] has a lagged effect on female offending in that offending emerges "late" specifically in adulthood (Carbone-Lopez and Miller, 2012; Cernkovich, Lanctot, and Giordano, 2008; Siegel and Williams, 2003). Joyce, Elena, and Kimberly all were victims of maltreatment as children. Joyce was sexually abused as a child and grew up in about 27 foster families. Elena was abandoned by her drug addicted mother and never experienced any parental care. While Kimberly was not characterised as growing up in abject poverty, she was abused by her stepfather and treated as an outcast by her peers because she was overweight. Ross et al. (2016) contends that "maltreatment has widespread effects on brain development, which are pronounced in brain regions important to emotion interpretation and impulse control that may increase vulnerability to delinquent activities and incarceration" (p.585). The structural connections of maltreatment and poverty underscored in the narratives of Joyce, Virginia, Elena, and Kimberly may be used to explain why these violent women were framed as deviant and why they contributed to having their spouses murdered. These women are therefore categorised as being deviant for all of their negative experiences in childhood.

[24] Maltreatment as defined by the Centers for Disease Control includes sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, physical neglect and exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV).

Women and Agency

Feminist and non-feminist researchers alike use agency to consider the aetiology of violent women and in this project, agency denotes women who intentionally kill in goal-directed manner and are not categorised as either women who are victimised, deviant or mentally ill. Sewell (1992) says: "to be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is integrated, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree" (p. 20). Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez (2006) argue that considering women's violence as abnormal protects a women's constitutive script in a gendered society and they also point to a general unwillingness by feminists to acknowledge that women's violence is not solely because of oppression in a male-dominated space (p. 322). Moreover, the argument is that violent perpetration by women occur in a wide range of circumstances and is not limited to sad, mad, or bad categories but can emerge in situations of jealousy, self-presentation, the desire for reparation, money, or respect (Kruttschnitt, 2016; Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez 2006).

Agency in *Snapped* was situated around intentional acts, including murder, perpetrated by women. The women in these cases were represented as active subjects, meaning that they actively sought out their victims in order to inflict harm upon them. Women are not supposed to be active subjects in cases of violence; they are, rather, usually framed (as I have shown) as reactive, irrational, or out of control. I identified agency in these murderous women's narratives by looking at how they were framed as sound of mind, able to exert control over themselves and others and be the dominant parties or initiators in their social relations and interactions. In this series the two women represented as operating with agency were: Diane Zamora (1009) and Carolyn Warmus (1013).

Preserving their love

Diane in episode nine was portrayed as an aggressive woman that always got what she wanted because she was laser focused at achieving all of her "lofty goals". The goals that she set included her enrolment at the United States Naval Academy after she completed high school and upon graduation, to marry her high school sweetheart, David.

Diane was able to mark off her checklist enrolment at the naval academy which she achieved but marrying David never came to fruition. While at the naval academy, Diane shared her dreams with her roommates, and also shared that she and David would be together forever because they held each other's fate: David had killed for her. When Diane was questioned by authorities about Adrianne's murder, she denied everything. When David was questioned by authorities, he confessed to everything and told them where they could find the evidence. Both were subsequently charged with Adrianne's murder.

At the trial a diminutive Diane was dressed in pants suits and projected a serious look. David, who was awaiting his separate trial for the murder, testified that Diane was the mastermind behind the killing. According to David's testimony, Diane was the initiator of events**:** "I went out there to her [Adrianne] and just vaguely shot her once and got back into the car and Diane said 'Are you sure she's dead? Make sure she's dead,' and I went back out got a little closer, fired two more times and got back in the car Then Diane picked up a barbell from the backseat and hit Adrianne with it."

There was no audio only narration and video footage presented of the trial on the show. Diane testified in her own defence where she told the court that Adrianne's murder was all planned by David. The narrative created by the Prosecution however was that Diane was the mastermind behind the murder plot – witnesses testified that Diane said Adrianne deserved to be

killed because she was promiscuous – and that Diane had memorialised Adrianne's murder – she had the date and time of the killing on her calendar. Diane was sentenced to life with the possibility of parole after 40 years for her involvement in Adrianne's murder. After the verdict was read the video footage showed Diane who looked stoic and resigned to her sentence.

In Diane's storyline it was suggested that her relationship with David developed extremely fast and her focus was on building a new life with David and no one else. Diane was presented as selfish and deliberate in her actions. She was the dominant partner in the relationship who plotted the murder of her contemporary Adrianne and "strongly urged" her boyfriend David, to kill to "preserve their love." While David fired the gunshots, Diane a deliberate actor in the plot and murder, delivered blows to Adrianne's head with a barbell to ensure death. It was her intent to kill.

Fatal Attraction

Snapped producers framed elementary school teacher Carolyn Warmus (1013) like Diane, as an aggressive woman who always got what she wanted, but in the context of Carolyn's life it was due to her enormous wealth and striking beauty. In fact, the narrative described her as a "young temptress" who was "drop-dead gorgeous." According to Forensic Psychologist Diana Falkenbach, persons born wealthy are accustomed to getting their way and are trained to be more assertive and aggressive than others in getting whatever they want in life.

Carolyn was born into privilege and grew up in one of the most affluent areas of the United States. Not only was Carolyn a millionaire heiress but she was also smart and used her intellect to become a teacher. At the elementary school where she taught, Carolyn initially found a mentor in co-worker and Physical Education teacher Paul Solomon before the two started an

affair. Notwithstanding the affair, Carolyn positioned herself into Solomon's family as a friend of the family often having dinners at his home with his wife Betty Jeanne and their daughter Kristan. Carolyn however wanted more than being the "other woman," but this goal was *unattainable*.

According to the show's portrayal, Carolyn was accustomed to getting everything she wanted. It was revealed that Carolyn had a history of becoming to some extent obsessed with her lovers – one had to get a restraining order to keep her from attending his wedding and the other she had followed by a private investigator to get photos in order to superimpose herself on the photographs and send to his wife. Carolyn refused to accept Solomon's rejection and shot and killed his wife to have Solomon all to herself. Hours after killing Betty Jeanne, Carolyn met Paul for a tryst showing her satisfaction of having Paul to herself.

The narrator called the trial, which lasted four months, "the Fatal Attraction Trial". Carolyn's trial was a media circus with people lined up outside including celebrities and multiple news stations to report daily on the case. And according to the narration Carolyn's appearance at trial featured more like a fashion show than that of the defendant in a murder trial. Video footage showed Carolyn's arrival to court in a limo. She was always stylishly dressed, with designer sunglasses and many times with fur coats, mini skirt suits and broad brimmed hats. The narrator said she was dressed as if she was stepping onto a fashion runway, "the millionaire who dressed like a supermodel." One juror said, "There was not one man in the courtroom that did not stare at her, she was gorgeous." A reporter even produced a daily column "Witness Wear Daily" to report on Carolyn's fashion to court.

There was only narration of the trial and minimal photographs. According to the Prosecution, Carolyn always got what she wanted including the death of her lover's wife. A

vignette of Betty Jeanne's lifeless bullet riddled body on the floor near her sofa was shown in court. While the defense argued there was no direct evidence found at the crime scene that linked Carolyn to the murder, corroborating evidence of a gun purchased from her private investigator; purchase of a silencer and purchase of ammunition with a fake ID, all according to the Prosecution, were linkages to Carolyn's involvement in the murder. After two trials, Carolyn was found guilty of murder in the second degree and sentenced to 25 years to life with the possibility of parole in 2017. [25] Carolyn was a rational subject and exercised agency in that it was her sole intent to kill Betty Jeanne. Carolyn had access to millions of dollars and could have hired a professional to kill the victim, but she murdered her herself because she wanted to ensure that Betty Jeanne could not prohibit the relationship with Paul in the future.

My reading of the framing of Diane and Carolyn on the show is that these two women were constructed as having agency because while they transgressed the normative discourse by engineering murder (Diane) and committing murder (Carolyn) of women, they did not kill men. Diane and Carolyn remained in the constructs of female normativity albeit on the outskirts, in that they acted in a manner to keep their man by getting rid of their rivals as some "normal" women do for jealousy or revenge.

Both women were not presented as mad, bad, or sad but as competent and intelligent women and had choices to make that did not have to involve murder but chose murder instead. They could have opted to end the relationships with the men, but they opted not to because they acted with human agency to keep the men in their life and get rid of the woman.

[25] Carolyn was released from prison on parole in 2019 after serving 27 years.

Sad Women

In my literature review, I noted, that the discourse of the victimised or "sad" woman who kills, emerged in the 1980's as a rationalisation rooted in victimisation by domestic violence.[26] The *sad* woman is understood as having been physically abused by male partners through "kicking, punching, and beating up" (Ferraro, 2006, p. 16). Acknowledging that violent women are victims first is arguably due in part to violent women being understood in academia as rare, if they are seen to exist at all.[27] While scholars have traditionally overlooked female domestic violent offending in research (Goldenson, 2007) documented evidence exists that proves that women are perpetrators of violence typically for self-defence or for non-aggressive reasons (Miller & Meloy, 2006, p. 89). Nonetheless, normative frames posit women as virtuous, caring and pure, but also as victims (rather than perpetrators) of violence (Boyd 1999; Glenn1994; Oakley 1992). When a woman kills, she transgresses the normative framework and leaves theorists scrambling to explain her violent tendencies. Imagining her transgressions as linked to her victimisation, repositions these women who kill back within the normative frame.

In the thirteen episodes I studied, I sought out narratives about female killers who were physically assaulted and emotionally abused by their male victims. I found none that could be linked to the sad discourse. While Susan Wright (1010) and Lee Ann Reidel (1006) claimed to be victims of intimate partner violence, there was nothing in their portrayals on *Snapped* to suggest that their claims were true. In fact, the account given in their episodes was that they were both liars: their alleged abuse by their male partners was never substantiated. In the literature

[26] Now referred to as intimate partner violence (Ferraro, 2006; Walker, 2006)) and focuses on both sexual and emotional links between the abuser and the abused individual and includes unmarried couples that live together "inclusive of same-sex partners, dating partners and former partners" (Ferraro, p. 15).
[27] It should be noted that while research exists on female perpetrators of violence it is substantially small when compared to research on violent men.

review, I expounded on *Snapped* being a true crime series but experiencing the stunning growth of RTV that had only begun to become popular with viewing audiences with the creation of *Survivor* in 2000, four years before its first season. An explanation for why the sad discourse was overtly omitted out of the first season may be that producers were looking for the most sensational stories of women who kill that audiences were not familiar with at the time. And Cable television as paid television programming was able to provide storylines on darker female characters that totally disturbed an audience by dismantling conventional views of violence, gender, race and sexuality. It should be noted that all the women in Season One were white and that as the show progressed over its 16 years of production and 29 seasons, the need to relate to a growing audience with more nuances that would include diversity, stories of sad, *mad,* and *bad* discourses but also that of agency and survivorship would be paramount.

For example, in season seven there is the account of Brigitte Harris who castrated and then suffocated her father to death in 2007. Although not in my data sampling, I have viewed all the seasons up to season 10 when my Cable Provider removed the Oxygen Network from the country's cable line-up. She was born to Liberian parents in New York and lived with her mother until age two when her mother abandoned her, and she was sent to live with her paternal grandmother. Brigitte in her on-camera interview gave accounts of years of physical abuse by her grandmother and sexual abuse by family members including her father. She said when her father returned to New York with the intention of having her nieces return to Liberia with him, she confronted him at her apartment. The confrontation got heated before Brigitte handcuffed, castrated and gagged her father which eventually led to him dying from asphyxiation. The jury found her guilty of the lesser sentence of second-degree manslaughter, but the judge sentenced

her to 5 – 15 years despite letters from jurors asking for leniency. Following political pressure from New York senators and national publicity, Brigitte was released on probation in 2009.

While focusing on victimised women who kill is an appropriate way to understand reactionary violence on their part, framing women as sad has also forced women to inhabit a space of victimhood that many may reject with no alternative framework for their actions. In other words, if women accept the label of sad, they are at the same time accepting the notion of powerlessness. I use Brigitte's storyline as a counter example because she was clearly victimised by multiple failures of various systems, but producers worked hard to not script Brigitte as sad nor was she presented as mad or bad even though she may have fitted in some capacity. Unlike the women in season one of *Snapped*, Brigitte's actions were depicted as being somewhat fluid between agency and mainstream discourses. For example, Brigitte's killing of her father speaks to her using agency as at the time of the murder Brigitte's intention was to stop her father from abusing her niece. Yet, her killing her father, was also in some ways critiquing agency because of her victimization and clear oppression of misogyny and being a racialised person with little or no status in America as she was a poor, young, African American, who experienced life in the U.S. and Africa. All these circumstances composed to make her a very different actor in her narrative from the other women portrayed on *Snapped* who had some social power in the world. Brigitte was depicted as a survivor.

Conclusion

While it is not to suggest that mad (pathology), sad (victimisation) and bad (deviance) discourses of women who kill are not dominant in the literature, women exhibiting agency creates an alternative explanation. Both Diane Zamora (1009) and Carolyn Warmus (1013)

operated outside feminist explanations for women who kill rationally and intentionally. When women kill and their agency is recognised, it is argued that they are offending not only against the aggrieved person but against their own gender (Kirkwood 2000; Lloyd 1995; Mills 1997 Morrissey 2003). As Mills noted: "The femme fatale is the female figure symbolised by 'the women with a gun in her purse' – a sort of detachable penis/dildo which may also be a knife or a snake" (in Creed 1993, p. 157). The *Snapped* storylines framed Diane and Carolyn as intentional planners of the murders who participated in their plans coming to fruition. These deliberate semi-autonomous actions in which the women killed their rivals place both women in the category of exhibiting agency. Messerschmidt (as cited in Greeson & Campbell 2011) reflects this idea of agency defining the term as "behaviours in which a person chooses to engage in order to shape his or her experiences within social structures in light of his or her understanding of the social structures that surround and constrain his or her options'". Both women created and followed through with the murder plots to place themselves in new social structures – becoming the only women in the lives of the men they loved. Betty Jeanne threatened Carolyn's desire to be Solomon's wife and Adrianne threatened a monogamous relationship with David.

While agency is not a mainstream criminological discourse to explain female lethal violence, it is particularly useful in my data set and provides another way of understanding women who kill. It should be reiterated that the initial draft of this thesis was written in 2014 when there was extant literature provided on the topic of women using agency in violent acts. Today, in 2021, while agency is still not a mainstream criminological discourse from my cursory findings, studies exist that focus on not just studying individually constituted agency but "distributed agency" (Campbell and Mannell 2015); agency as a "blame analysis" (Felson, 2014); agency in crime fiction (Mantymaki, 2013); and modalities of agency (Venäläinen, 2016)

Chapter Seven

Discussion

The Findings

I wanted to explore the first season of *Snapped* to see if and how female killers during the debut in 2004 of the show were positioned as mad, sad, bad or if they were framed as having agency. These dominant discourses mad (mental illness); sad (victimisation); bad (deviance) are mainstream theories to explain when women kill. Agency speaks to women acting as rational subjects devoid of pejorative conceptualisations and dislocates dominant discourses.

I was interested in how *Snapped* deployed traditional discourses of criminology and if the idea of agency was evident in any of the episodes – were women framed within conforms of unequal power relations or perhaps women used agency when they committed the violent acts of murders. A feminist poststructuralist framework was used which allows for the examination of traditional discourses of women who kill, and also allows for scrutiny of gender for a better understanding of how women who kill are conceptualised. The data used for this project included the 13 episodes in the first season of *Snapped*. I used a qualitative content analysis because "it is a staple method for those engaging in communications research with Krippendorff (2004) noting that content analysis is consistently used in research related to mass communication (p. 3). I also utilised a thematic analysis to identity themes and because the method is more flexible and easily adaptable to research (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Women who kill are not sad

Women who kill abusive partners are understood within a normative frame of femininity which includes placing an emphasis on victimisation (Mäntymäki, 2013; Morissey, 2003; Noh et al. 2010). A significant finding of this research however is that none of the storylines included in the first season of *Snapped* could be linked to this dominant discourse. The episodes that told the stories of Lee Ann Reidel and Susan Wright included their allegations that they were abused by their spouses, but the series also included testimony that these allegations were debunked when Lee Ann and Susan were constructed as murderous, manipulative women with a knack for lying.

While I wish in no way to discount the victimisation of women, I do believe that the sad woman was omitted because victimised women who kill in reactive ways to protect themselves or their children, (Brookman, 2005; Sabri et al, 2016; Titterington & Subjack, 2012) is a common discourse in criminology. *Snapped* in its debut sought to produce storylines that were not of the norm and could provide darker elements of female lethal violence as a measure to shock viewers. Towards this end, the inaugural season only broadcast storylines of white women who "snapped". White women receive preferential treatment in the Criminal Justice System whereas minorities "face unequal treatment at every stage of the CJS (Harmon & Boppre, 2018, p.311). While female offending and incarceration remains considerably lower than male counterparts, Bonzar (in Harmon & Boppre, 2018) reveals that racial/ethnic disparities among females are similar to that of males: "1 out of every 18 African American females were incarcerated in the early 2000s, whereas 1 out of every 45 Latinas and 1 out of every 111 White females were imprisoned" (p. 312). Moreover "whiteness" according to Frankenberg (1993), is a location of structural advantage, or race privilege. White women as a collective are known to

exploit their privilege when things are not going their way and have a long history[28] in the United States of weaponizing their victimhood (Lang 2020, para.7). Like the recent exposure of "Karens"[29] in Central Park who called police and falsely claimed that a black man threatened her, or in San Francisco who phoned police on a person of colour stencilling #BLM in the front of his home, *Snapped's* first season line-up of only white women shows them not as victims but instigators of violence.

Women who kill are mad

The most common discourse used to describe women who kill is that they were mad during the commission of the crime (Africa, 2010). In criminology to be mad is to be represented as mentally disturbed, hysterical, and irrational (Comey & Brickey, 2007, Ussher 1992). My analysis showed that the series supported the dominant view that women who kill fit within the mad discourse, in fact, four of the episodes discursively positioned madness as an explanation for women's violent behaviour.

In my sample I found four portrayals of murderous women that drew upon stereotypical discourses of madness. Joyce Lemay Cohen and Kristen Rossum were characterised as mad due to their commission of murderous acts while under the influence of impairing substances, cocaine and meth, respectively. Clara Harris on the other hand, was profiled as having "snapped" due to David's ongoing affair. Ruthann Aron was profiled as being psychologically disturbed, specifically suffering from pathological narcissism. These findings disadvantage women by

[28] Historical narrative of white women's victimhood can be traced to myths formulated during the American slave era where white women were presented as morally good and needed protection by white men from Black slaves who posed sexual threats to their well-being. This perpetuated racial violence when in reality white slave owners were raping the black female slaves.

[29] Karen is a slang term for middle-aged white women who demonstrate racism, privilege and entitlement and phone police if they meet opposition from their behaviour.

denying them agency and by reinforcing the normative gender stereotype that equates madness with femininity.

Women who kill are bad

The third prevalent discourse used to construct women who kill is that they are bad or deviant (Africa, 2010; Ringrose, 2006). This bad or deviant labelling of violent women as explained in chapters three and six, places women into sub-categories of being sexual deviant and/or having early exposure to violence. My qualitative review of the first season of *Snapped* found nine women whose behaviour fit this model. *Snapped* storylines reinforced female violent crime as located within life stories of structural disadvantage and through scheming, deviousness, adultery, and lesbianism.

Celeste Beard Johnson and Debra Lynn Baker's lesbianism is used discursively to fit both women in the bad label; women who are not heterosexual are in this framework regarded as "pathologically abnormal" (Seal, 2010, p. 107). These women were also defined as promiscuous, further stigmatizing them. Susan Wright was represented as sexually adventurous and conniving. Five other women were depicted as adulterous, greedy, and devious killers: Virginia Lazerlere who engaged in several adulterous relationships before conspiring to murder her husband; Elena Kiejliches who had sexual escapades in the marital bed while her young children were in the home; Kimberly Hricko who cheated with a lover; Lee Ann Reidel who enlisted her lover to kill her husband; and Kristin Rossum who was having an affair with her boss.

The series appeared to connect discourses of promiscuity with poverty suggesting that promiscuous women were more likely to be those whose start in life was more disadvantaged than most. Virginia Lazerlere and Joyce Lemay Cohen grew up in abject poverty. Virginia

bartered sexual favours to escape poverty while Joyce spent most of her childhood relocating from over twenty foster homes. A young Elena Kiejliches was abandoned by a drug addicted mother who was also a sex worker and grew up on the streets of Russia, while Kimberly Hricko was sexually abused by her stepfather. The findings show that poverty and maltreatment are discursively aligned with violence in women in their later years. Moreover, the series makes a link between the intersecting of multiple marginalisations (poverty, promiscuity, maltreatment) that may account for the women being labelled in the bad discourse.

Women who kill exhibit agency

In this thesis, two women profiled challenged the prevailing belief that women who kill are devoid of agency – socialite and elementary schoolteacher Carolyn Warmus (1013) and naval cadet Diane Zamora (1009). Agency, as set out in chapters two and three, denotes women who are in full control of their mental processes – they are not mad; described as being aggressive in their personal relationships and not victimised – they are not sad; cannot relate to structural disadvantages of poverty – they are not bad*;* but they are intentional actors who sought to kill the women involved with "their" men instead of leaving the respective relationships. Establishing that women who kill demonstrate agency is consistent with Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez (2006) who argue that a woman's agency does exist and that not all women's violent perpetration stems from her gendered marginalisation (p. 322). Further, they were presented as unrepentant for their actions and had no concern for the victims even though Diane was an acquaintance of Adrianne and Carolyn was often the dinner guest at Betty Jeannne's home. Nine months had passed before Diane was charged with murder. Diane had continued with her life with no concern about her actions in being the mastermind in Adrianne's murder or in

participating in the murder. Like Diane, Carolyn had no concern for the victim and was performing her daily duties and only feigned shock when police interrogated and later charged her with Betty Jeanne's murder.

It is interesting that these two cases where the women were presented utilising agency were the only two cases in the series where women were murdered. I contend, that to the "keep the men" in their lives they "performed" like men operating with lethal violence. The poststructuralist thought that underpins this research "deconstructs discourses of femininity and masculinity and essentialising practices that lock women and men into particular subject positions or categorizations" (Davies et. al, 2006). In this context of a postmodernist theory, Carolyn and Diane were "freed" from the normative femininity when they operated with agency.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I introduced this study, reviewed the literature, laid my theoretical foundation, presented the research method used, and ended with my findings. In this concluding chapter I will draw this thesis together by revisiting the research question which underpins this project. This chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, I discuss my approach to the research. The second section focuses on the findings and leads into the third section: the significance of this project to the field of criminology. The fourth section highlights future research suggestions, and the fifth and final section offers a re-evaluation of the limitations of this thesis.

My Research Approach

I initiated this thesis to address whether or not dominant criminological discourses used to understand female killers are consistent with those found in representation of women who kill on the first season of the TV series *Snapped.* My principal aim therefore was to determine if the storylines on the show replicated the mainstream conceptualisations of a woman's lethal violence; that is, that a woman who kills is mentally unstable (mad), commits reactive acts of violence (sad) or exhibits deviance (bad). I asked the question "How does *Snapped* challenge or reaffirm the dominant theories of women who kill?" In trying to answer this question I sought to examine the series' account of what drives ordinary women to kill and to see how the narratives represented appear to support or reject stereotypical gender norms and narratives about female violence. In seeking to answer my research question I used a poststructuralist framework to look at how discourses shape women's realities, which also

brought into play the social construction of gender and the idea of women who kill exhibiting agency.

Contributions and Significance of Research

This thesis contributes to feminist criminology and adds to the limited but growing body of work on female lethal violence (Comack & Brickley, 2007; Mantymaki, 2013; Morissey, 2003; Pelvin, 2019; Potts & Weare, 2018; Seal, 2010) While this thesis recognises dominant theories that women who kill are mad, sad, and bad, it simultaneously rejects that all women who kill on *Snapped* can be compartmentalised, into these discourses. More specifically by focusing on violent perpetration that encompassed all the mainstream discourses I acknowledged a women's propensity to not conform to these discourses alone, but to commit violent acts by exhibiting agency. Agency is not a prevailing discourse used to explain women's homicide, but this thesis has argued that it has relevance for a number of storylines in this project. As explained in chapter two, agency involves wilful and intentional actions. Importantly for this thesis, recognising agency shifts the discussion of murderous women outside of dominant discourses.

In her article titled "Not the Usual Suspects: The Obfuscation of Political Economy and Race in *CSI*" Dr. Kevin Bonnycastle explores how the idea of a rational choice person committing a crime makes criminality very clear and in the absence of this, cases are harder to solve such as are depicted on *CSI*. She illustrates through examples of *CSI* that there is no systemic nature of violence presented on the show. Bonnycastle (2009) explains that when one watches *CSI* one begins to believe that all crimes are committed by educated, upper middle class,

usually white persons and not by socially accepted disadvantaged poor minorities. Says Dr. Bonnycastle, "In other words, a narrative choice is made across the *CSI* episodes that I viewed to link its meager cast of racialised characters to privilege and power rather than underclass America" (p. 157). She continues, "In lieu of widespread cultural images of "the criminal" as Other or "not like the rest of us," the vast majority of these episodes cast a new criminal type that is white, economically stable or bourgeois with no harbingers of deviance from dominant social norms" (p. 157).

Like Bonnycastle's exploration of *CSI*, the reality of murderous women complicates criminality as evidenced by the women profiled in this season of *Snapped* who were all white with no systemic violence and where they were not privilege became privilege, ultimately transgressing class and social divisions of the upper class. Further, in showcasing agency within a number of the storylines, *Snapped* illustrated a tension that exists between the discourses. This tension ultimately presents a catch 22 situation of sorts when explaining female lethal violent perpetration: if women exhibit agency, they are choosing to be criminals and as Bonnycastle explained, makes criminality explainable. On the other hand, if women who kill have no agency, they are overtaken by being mad, sad, or bad.

Future Research

My sample focused on the first season of one TV show, but *Snapped* is now in its 29th season with nearly 16 years of production, and crime TV remains incredibly popular. Future research would be to analyse episodes from all 29 seasons to see how the discourses of gender and crime have changed. Further research could compare and contrast the depiction of women who kill on the television series *Deadly Women* with the women who kill on *Snapped*. Another

suggestion for future research is to look at different mode of expression such as non-fictional books, specifically an exploration on how producers as opposed to authors frame women who kill. My final suggestion is that the research may be enhanced by including direct interviews with women who kill on *Snapped* whereby one can eliminate secondary information and interpretation.

Limitations

My thesis studied dominant discourses of women who kill in the TV series *Snapped* but my experience in analysing my sample suggests a few limitations. Firstly, my project is a historical study of the conceptualisations in the early 2000's of women who kill and since this time, significant research and developments in gender were completed. These developments which include non-binary and trans identities, most of which are not discussed by criminologists, are not in this this thesis due to parameters of this project and I acknowledge this limitation.

Second, this project focused on a true crime show and as such, the reader should be mindful that while the accounts are real, as the "blurring of boundaries" in the true crime genre exists and defined in chapter two, producers may manipulate stories and scenes to make them more exciting. My analysis, therefore, was limited to how producers presented these women to an audience.

Third, in focusing on the individual stories of the women on the first season of *Snapped* I did not provide an in-depth look at the broader socio-economic factors or intersecting oppressions that function to locate women in particular ways. While an intersectional approach could be useful for this project, my work focused solely on the analysis of the truthful accounts as presented by the producers of *Snapped.*

Fourth, I focused on only the first season of the TV series. Therefore, I concede that I could have used a comparative analysis of various seasons to see how producers depict other stories of women who kill while remaining within the limits of the early 2000s.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis was an examination of the mainstream pejorative characterisations that women who kill are mad (mentally disordered), sad (victimised) and bad (deviant). This thesis contends that these dominant discourses were not evident in every situation, if at all. I found that women who kill on *Snapped* were both mad and bad but reactionary violence was not found. Examining the omission of the vicitimised women on *Snapped* also brings into focus the tension of representation; that is, that more representation is not always good if it reinforces the existing stereotypes. For example, if in every episode of *Snapped* there was a narrative of a victimised or battered woman, after a while the audience may become desensitized to the plight of the sad woman who commits murder when her well-being or that of her children is threatened. At the same time, critics and scholars can only make assumptions about the function and effect of a TV show as "the ways in which an audience may be watching it, and the kinds of pleasure that any series may afford cannot be assumed simply from the text" (Turnbull 2014, p. 14).

In looking at the omission of the victimised woman from the episodes of *Snapped* examined in this thesis, I believe it is noteworthy to revisit the long history of the white woman's victimhood briefly explored in chapter seven. Without having conducted an interview with the producers, I can only speculate (because I do not know) that the rationale was to present a more sensational story than victimisation while simultaneously presenting a different take on perpetrators of lethal violence: white women. If the show had focused on a group of murderous

women, and half of them had been minorities, then the argument might have been more complicated. But since the first season of *Snapped* only depicted murderous white women, women who are not overpoliced or disenfranchised by the CJS, the most sensational aspects of the text remain in place.

The ways that the women are framed in the first season of *Snapped* leaves room in my reading of the first season to have agency as another possible discourse to explain lethal female violence. Agency opens up discussion; it offers an alternative way of thinking about women and violence and illustrates the need for other explanations for women who kill to be canvassed and then accepted to provide a fuller discourse and understanding. Until this happens, and until an ideological shift occurs, women who kill will continue to be framed within dominant discourses of being sad, mad and bad. Further, when this shift does occur and for criminology to continue to move forward, the uncomfortable issue of murderous women having agency will have to be addressed.

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