Representations of Gender on the Television Series *Deadly Women*

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representations of gender and femininity on the television series *Deadly Women*. Each episode deals with three real-life cases of female murderers, each organized around the theme of the particular episode. The three chosen case representations were analyzed through a critical gender studies theoretical lens. The specific theories utilized were Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) performativity theory, R.W. Connell's (1995, 2002) notion of multiple masculinities and femininities, Judith Halberstam's (1998) notion of female masculinity, and Ann Lloyd's (1995) doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis. The cases analyzed were Aileen Wuornos ("Predators", Season 2 (2008), episode 6), Jill Coit ("Fortune Hunters", Season 4 (2010), episode 3), and Ashley Humphrey ("Dangerous Liaisons", Season 4 (2010), episode 4). These three cases are viewed as particular performatives of violent transgressions of the social norm regarding 'appropriate' femininity. Aileen Wuornos' representation replicates conventional understandings of female killers, in (re)producing the notion of the 'monstrous' predatory femininity of such women. Her "monsterization" (Morrissey, 2003) is often juxtaposed with testimony to Wuornos' own troubled background. Wuornos' own victimhood, however, is never portrayed in a manner that would condone her serial murders. The latter two cases provide alternative ways of understanding and discussing female killers. Jill Coit performs a version of (deadly) female masculinity (c.f. Halberstam, 1998), killing one husband while disguised in oversize men's clothing and a clearly fake handlebar moustache. Finally, Ashley Humphrey performs a version of dangerous violent racialized hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2002) and of victimized femininity.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this Master's thesis project to my family and friends, who gave me a shoulder to cry on in moments of stress and anxiety and who provided support and counsel when they were able to. I would also like to dedicate this project to the directors and producers of the television show *Deadly Women*, without which I would not have been inspired to undertake such an arduous and worthwhile thesis project!

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I would have also struggled greatly had it not been for the technological support of Neil Schau, Jack Shen, and Daniel LaPlante. These men helped me tremendously in accessing *Deadly Women* episodes on Netflix USA and on the Internet. Without their technical knowledge, I would not have been able to access and view a vast majority of the episodes in my sample. Thank you so much for your technological wizardry!

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not express my deep gratitude to my wonderful family and friends, who listened to me gripe endlessly about my stress and concerns, and provided advice and support when they could. I love all of you!

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction and Research Questions

I have been watching crime-related media ever since I can remember. I have always been interested in criminology and various crime-related media forms. It was a natural progression for me to write my Honours thesis and, now, my Master's thesis on crime in the media. Here, I focus on the show *Deadly Women*, now in its 8th season.

Deadly Women is a television series that originally aired in 2005 as a mini-series of three episodes on the *Discovery Channel*. This mini-series dramatized four real-life cases of female murderers in each episode. Marsha Crenshaw narrated each of these cases. After a two-year hiatus, the show resumed production in 2008 and began airing on the *Investigation Discovery Channel* as a regularly scheduled series. Since 2008, Beyond International has produced *Deadly Women* in Australia. Through dramatic re-enactments, each episode in the later series deals with three real-life cases of female killers organized around the theme of the particular episode. Lynnanne Zager narrates the cases in this later series (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deadly_Women). In this thesis, I focus on the episodes in the later series of *Deadly Women*. In the majority of episodes, former FBI agent and criminal profiler Candice DeLong offers insights into the psychology of female killers, while forensic pathologist Dr. Janis Amatuzio provides expert commentary on the crime-scene evidence[1].

Although there has been an abundance of scholarly work on representations of crime in the mass media, there has been no examination of *Deadly Women* in particular. *Deadly Women* is important, and distinct from other television shows, since it centres on

[1] http://investigation.discovery.com/tv-shows/deadly-women/about-this-show/about-deadly-women.htm

dangerous women and is based solely upon (gender normative) representations of female murderers. Thus, through undertaking a systematic review of *Deadly Women* from a critical gender studies lens, this project will add to the extant studies regarding women, crime and the media. I am specifically interested in examining how female killers are represented in the television show *Deadly Women*. My primary working questions throughout this thesis were: How are *female* murderers depicted in the *Deadly Women* television series? In what ways is gender performed in this series? Are the women performing a form of femininity or of female masculinity (c.f. Halberstam, 1998)? Sub-questions included: Are these female killers represented in accordance with being doubly deviant and doubly damned (c.f. Lloyd, 1995)? Do the narrative and technical aspects of *Deadly Women* (for example, the sombre music, dramatic narration, close-up shots of the actors playing the female killers staring defiantly or coldly into the camera) play into the doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis?

In the following section, I will review some of the extant scholarly literature concerning women, crime and the media.

Literature Review

In this subsection, I will provide a brief overview of past scholarly work on women, crime and the media. Since most people do not have direct or indirect exposure to crime, they often rely on the mass media for their information regarding crime. Thus, the media can be influential in shaping opinions and attitudes about crime (Chermak, 1994, p. 95-96). Media representations of crime are thus extremely important.

Our society is highly mediacentric, since much of what people know (or think they know) about the social world is influenced by the mass media. Mediacentrism refers

to the process of understanding social reality through the imposition of 'frames' that impose a particular meaning or cultural frame of reference on the world (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, p. 192). Under mediacentrism, social reality, in its current form, is frequently and inevitably interpreted from a media perspective as natural and normal, while other positions are subsequently dismissed (Shohat & Stam, 1994) or ignored. According to this approach, the process of media reporting of events has the consequence of promoting one perspective to the exclusion of others (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, p. 54).

I am particularly interested in the media representations of female killers. Women who murder may be viewed as doubly deviant and thus doubly damned, since they have not only committed a crime, but have also transgressed traditional cultural notions of 'appropriate' femininity (c.f. Lloyd, 1995). Violent girls are often described and depicted as very brutal, vicious and lacking in remorse. They are demonized and pathologized; concurrently, their lives and concerns are trivialized and their crimes exaggerated. However, the rate of girls' violence is one-third that of boys, and such violence mainly involves cases of minor assault (Bell, 2002, p. 150). This double standard is sexist and plays into the dominant gender stereotypes of society. These prevailing gender stereotypes manipulate and produce the cultural discourses that people in positions of power and in the general public, as well as social structures, use to understand and examine women and violence. These stereotypes and discourses often subsequently contribute to the ways in which female violent criminals are understood, treated and ultimately dealt with by the institutions that affect their lives (Gilbert, 2002, p. 1271-1272).

Women have generally been overlooked or inadequately studied in traditional mainstream criminological and sociological theory and research (Comack, 2006, p. 22; Lloyd, 1995, p. 37; Newburn, 2007, p. 301). Women, especially criminal women, were consigned by early criminologists to the status of Other (for instance, Lombroso & Ferrero, 1895; Thomas, 1923; Glueck & Glueck, 1934; Pollack, 1950, cited in Comack, 2006, p. 22-27). These theories share the view of women as 'other' than men (not to mention as inferior), and criminal women as even more so. In such theories, it is women's intrinsic character that accounts for the nature and the extent of their criminality. Women are viewed as sexual beings and their criminality is highly sexualized (Comack, 2006, p. 24). These early theories essentialized women's biology in explanations of female criminality (see also Klein, 1973; Lloyd, 1995, p. xvi-xx).

In the 1960s, Heidensohn highlighted the relative scarcity of reliable studies of female criminality. She argued that the "lonely, uncharted seas" of female criminality were long overdue for serious academic analysis. She suggested that what was needed was a "crash programme of research which telescopes decades of comparable studies of males" (1968, cited in Newburn, 2007, p. 304). In the decades since her groundbreaking article, the scholarship on female criminality has been growing rapidly, both in terms of feminist and non-feminist research (see, for instance, Comack, 2006; Faith & Jiwani, 2002, p. 88-89; Newburn, 2007, p. 304-311). I will now delineate some of the ways in which research into female criminality has also explored its representation in various media forms.

Journalists and other media producers often rely on stock narratives and stereotypes to explain female violent crime, in the absence of any alternative discourse(s).

Such stereotypes often conceal or partially represent aspects of the woman's involvement in the crime, thus allowing the public to use cultural symbolic representations to fill in the gaps as they see fit. These narratives also render women unstable, passive and lacking in moral agency (Jewkes, 2011, p. 126-127).[2]

The androcentric nature of society plays a significant role in how all women are viewed and treated as 'other' than, and inferior to, men. As Lloyd (1995) argues:

> Those doing the defining, by that very act, are never defined as 'other', but are the norm. Those different from the norm—in this case, women—are thus off-centre, deviant. Man is the norm, the objective standard by which others are measured. Men are perceived to be independent, rational, autonomous and responsible. The…other, the female is therefore dependent, emotional, not entirely adult and irresponsible. She is defined in reference to men (p. xvii).

Such 'othering' plays an important role in the media stereotypes of violent women. These essentialist and untrue stereotypes inform every aspect of a woman's passage through the criminal justice system, from prior to arrest to treatment in, and discharge from, prison or psychiatric institutions (Lloyd, 1995, p. xviii-xix). Yet, all alleged explanations for female crime that depend on and are informed by androcentric/misogynistic perceptions of women fail, since such perceptions of women are false. There is no single explanation for women's crime, violent or not (Lloyd, 1995, p. 52).

The media often tend to downplay or exclude contradictory narratives or explanations for violent crimes. For instance, Aileen Wuornos claimed self-defence for her murder of seven men in Florida. This 'othering' or deemphasizing of opposing

[2] Jewkes (2011) delineates eight standard narratives the media uses to explain female violent crime. The narratives include sexuality and sexual deviance; physical attractiveness (or absence of); bad wives; bad mothers; mythical monsters; mad cows; evil manipulators; and non-agents (p. 127). Lloyd (1995) provides a similar, yet more descriptive, account of such stereotypes, adding woman the deceiver, woman as victim, and liberated woman as law-breaker to the list (p. 46-52).

explanations for violent crimes by the media demonstrates how deeply distressing our culture views such counter-narratives (Jewkes, 2011, p. 273).

Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) argue that media and popular constructions of female crime serve to demonize marginalized women, i.e. girls of colour and lesbian women (p. 29). The media construct these women as both masculine and violent. Such a construction serves to increase imprisonment for girls of colour and lesbian women. It also functions to act as a cautionary tale for all women that "if they raise any challenge to the present sex/gender system, they risk arrest and incarceration" (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006, p. 43). Feminists need to address the detrimental effects of masculinity to the same extent that they address the stereotypes associated with femininity. Feminists must also explore how women might express that masculinity as a proxy for gaining power in a patriarchal society (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006, p. 43-44). In this way, gender expressions or performances (of aggression, of violence) can act as a way to gain power in a patriarchal culture.

The following subsection outlines and summarizes the content of this thesis project in each of the subsequent chapters.

Signposting the Thesis

Here I now provide a brief chapter outline of the content of this thesis project. The methodology chapter that follows provides a brief methodological review of criminological studies of the media and female killers. Here, I also outline the particular method I chose to analyze *Deadly Women*, specifically close textual analysis (or close reading). The theory chapter outlines the critical gender studies lens of this media analysis. I interpret my cases using Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) performativity theory,

R.W. Connell's (1995, 2002) notion of multiple masculinities and femininities, Judith Halberstam's (1998) notion of female masculinity, and Ann Lloyd's (1995) doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis. In each of the following chapters, I interpret a particular case represented on the program *Deadly Women* using this combinatory framework. The three cases I have chosen to analyze all (re)present deviations from culturally approved femininity, and thus can be viewed as specific performativities of (violent) transgressions of this gendered social norm.

Judith Butler (1990) argues that identities are always in a process of 'becoming' (see also Connell, 2002, p. 4-5; Salih, 2002, p. 45-48). Regarding gender, what it means to be a man or a woman is (re)produced and sustained through acts, clothing, gestures, mannerisms, and so on. Hence, there are no 'natural' gender identities (Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2004, p. 348; Butler, 1990). Rather, (gender) identity is performative (see Butler, 1990, p. 34).

This applies to the disguises of (violent) femininity as enacted in the chosen case portrayals on *Deadly Women*. Such dangerous women may adopt masculine costumes to enable them to commit murder. In this sense, they may wear certain male outfits in order to be dressed to kill. For instance, Ashley Humphrey disguised herself to look like a black man to kill her rapist husband's victim/survivor. We see Ashley applying the black face paint that Tracey ordered her to wear, through her make-up compact mirror. Jill Coit wore a moustache during the violent murder of her ex-husband Gerry Boggs, and also donned a feminine red dress to kill another husband. Aileen Wuornos enacted a Damsel in Distress form of femininity on the highways of Florida to lure men into her trap. Each of these performatives of (violent) femininity will be expanded upon in their respective

case analysis chapters. *Deadly Women* represents the facts of Jill Coit and Ashley Humphrey's murder disguises, since both of these women did wear their respective costumes to kill (see, for instance, Tisch, 2005, and Weller, 1993). Aileen Wuornos did not wear an actual costume. However, she is portrayed wearing clothing that she likely would have worn to commit her crimes as an impoverished, unkempt serial-killing prostitute. In this sense, violent women in general could be viewed as disguising their femininity, or enacting a dangerous and monstrous form of femininity, when they kill.

Deadly Women can be viewed as a replication of conventional understandings of female killers. An example of this is the representation of Aileen Wuornos ("Predators," Season 2 (2008), episode 6), the serial-killing prostitute who shot seven men along Florida's highways. Wuornos was executed by lethal injection on October 9, 2001. Wuornos is typically portrayed in the media as both a "monster" and as a victim herself of an abusive and turbulent background. This portrayal holds true in Wuornos' case representation on *Deadly Women*. Here, Wuornos' "monsterization" (Morrissey, 2003) is often juxtaposed with expert testimony on Wuornos' own victimhood and tumultuous life story. Wuornos' own victim status, however, is never portrayed in a way that condones her violent criminal acts. In Chapter 3, I argue that Wuornos, as represented on *Deadly Women*, violently transgresses the traditional cultural notions of 'appropriate' femininity, through actively plying her sexual services on the highways of Florida and then brutally murdering seven men who gave her car rides and/or solicited her services.

However, *Deadly Women* also provides alternative ways of understanding and discussing female killers, two of which I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 4, I argue that in committing Gerry Boggs' murder disguised in oversize men's clothing and a

clearly fake handlebar moustache, Jill Coit ("Fortune Hunters," Season 4 (2010), episode 3) performs a version of (deadly) female masculinity (c.f. Halberstam, 1998). Yet, there is no detailed discussion on *Deadly Women* about Coit's male disguise and/or why she is depicted wearing it in the commission of Boggs' murder. There is also no discussion of why she is shown wearing the male costume to commit this murder, but is then shown wearing a bright red dress in the commission of her third husband William Coit's murder. I am not certain why the experts in this episode do not discuss this; however, this lack of discussion could be an instance of foreclosure. Foreclosure or exclusion operates to determine the boundaries of what is (un)speakable and (un)liveable within any discourse (Morrissey, 2003, p. 55). Hence, Jill Coit's enactment of female masculinity on *Deadly Women* and its subsequent minimal discussion by the experts on the series can be viewed as a foreclosing of sexed/gendered identities that are deemed to matter and not to matter within heterosexual power structures or the heterosexual matrix (see Butler, 1993, p. xxx; Salih, 2002, p. 76). I also discuss and explore other potential reasons for this interesting lack of detailed discussion during Coit's representation on *Deadly Women*.

In Chapter 5, I interpret Ashley Humphrey's case representation on *Deadly Women* ("Dangerous Liaisons," Season 4 (2010), episode 4) via her enactments of dangerous violent racialized hegemonic masculinity and of victimized femininity. Under the control of her husband Tracey Humphrey, Ashley is depicted killing Tracey's rape victim, Sandee Rozzo, to prevent her from testifying against Tracey. From the safety of his couch, Tracey Humphrey is shown ordering Ashley, in a series of cell phone conversations, to smear black face paint on her hands and face, and then telling her how to kill Sandee. Tracey is shown calmly and casually stating to Ashley over the phone: "I

want it everywhere. I want you to look like a black man." I argue that Ashley Humphrey enacts a form of dangerous violent racialized hegemonic masculinity (c.f. Connell, 1995, 2002) in the commission of Sandee Rozzo's murder. However, Ashley Humphrey is represented as being fully under Tracey's manipulative influence in committing this murder. Thus, though Ashley is not portrayed as a victim of (physical) domestic violence on *Deadly Women*, she still fits within the "woman as victim" stereotype (Lloyd, 1995, p. 49), or victimized femininity.

Lastly, I provide a succinct summary of my research here and its contributions to the extant academic body of knowledge on women, crime, and the media. I also recapitulate my rationale for choosing these three cases and my respective arguments regarding each representation. Implications of my research, as well as several areas for future scholarship, are then discussed. The next chapter discusses the methodology of my thesis project.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I review some criminological examinations of the media and female killers, focussing specifically on the methodologies undertaken by these scholars. I then delineate my choice of close textual analysis, aided by my critical gender studies theoretical framework, as my methodology for this thesis project. I also outline my specific research procedure for my analysis of *Deadly Women*. The following subsection reviews this criminological literature from a methodological perspective.

Methodological Literature Review

The following summaries show how some scholars have analyzed media representations of female killers, through specific methodologies including performativity theory. These are included to show a brief methodological account of criminological studies of the media and female murderers. I selected these sources because I thought they were well designed and detailed on their particular research procedures and methods. It is important to review how criminologists have analyzed (violent) women in the media, since this provides a scholarly 'roadmap' of how this issue has been studied within this methodological literature.

Drew Humphries (2009a) examines the social construction of female killers on *Law & Order*, and the extent to which this series may have reconciled the apparent contradictions between a female audience and a misogynist genre (p. 57). She focuses on character transformations, or the legal, power and moral changes carried out by prosecutors who confront female defendants in plea-bargaining or in the courtroom. Her research questions include: Are female killers located in the domestic sphere or in the

work sphere? Do *Law & Order* justice officials treat female murderers more or less harshly than men as regards plea-bargaining and courtroom decisions? What stigmatizing strategies are utilized to transform winners into losers and good girls into bad girls (p. 63)?

Humphries' (2009a) study is based on a convenience sample of twenty-two *Law & Order* episodes taped during a six-week period in the summer of 2001. Research assistants taped and coded the sample, assembling demographic data on the cast members. She reviewed the tapes to summarize storylines and then to examine the killers (Humphries, 2009a, p. 63). Murderers were defined as suspects who had been convicted or pled guilty. Unindicted murderers were categorized separately. Her definition yielded thirty-one murderers. As a group, the murderers were white (90%), thirty-five years of age and older (97%), consisted of slightly more men than women (58% to 43%, respectively), and were drawn equally from upper, middle, working-class, and poor backgrounds (Humphries, 2009a, p. 64).

Coding was focused on the context in which the murderer encountered his or her victim, either family or work. In the case of career couples or dual earners, the offender-victim relationship was taken into account, whether that of family, acquaintance or stranger (Humphries, 2009a, p. 64). In each episode, the researchers selected a plea-bargaining or courtroom scene that depicted the confrontation between prosecutors and defendants and then coded character transformations brought on by the prosecutor. A defendant's legal status was determined by charging decisions, convictions and acquittals. Killers were either uncharged or pled guilty. If prosecutors took the case to trial, killers were found guilty or acquitted. Hung juries were included with the acquittals

(Humphries, 2009a, p. 64). For moral and power status, the researchers first coded the murderers' benign outer façade and then coded his or her malevolent inner core. For each killer, they typed both personae and compared them to determine the direction of transformation. Winners were defined as those possessing charisma, a sense of destiny, or an ability to define and achieve goals. Losers were those who stood in the background, expressed displeasure, or sabotaged their own goals. Humphries and her research assistants used motives to define moral status: Good individuals had socially appropriate motives, whereas bad persons had corrupt or pathological motives (Humphries, 2009a, p. 64). This study provided me with a good outline of how to sample, code, conceptualize and operationalize relevant data from a television series (as a unit of analysis). However, since *Deadly Women* portrays actual cases of female killers, I thought it seemed sensible to consider a criminological case study analysis (see, for instance, Consalvo, 2003).

Mia Consalvo (2003) conducted a case study of the extensive news coverage immediately following the Columbine High School shootings, which demonstrated how gender continues to be an important factor in the analysis of crime news for both genders (p. 41). This study examines how the news media initially constructed Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, including the details of their past deemed relevant to their actions. She argues that the media's initial coverage emphasized particular factors while ignoring others, thus functioning to mostly absolve of responsibility systems such as hegemonic masculinity and school culture. Coverage also demonized specific media forms (video games and the Internet) as especially dangerous risk factors, with no actual evidence. Initial coverage set the tone for selecting and harassing unusual or nonconforming youths

across America who may have looked or behaved in ways that were now deemed dangerous (Consalvo, 2003, p. 28).

Consalvo's (2003) news coverage includes taped television news broadcasts for a week following the event on ABC, NBC, CNN, and CBS; coverage in the news magazines *Time*, *Newsweek* and *US News & World Report*; and editorials and articles from the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* and *The New York Times* (p. 28). She then justifies her choice in the particular news coverage, and the specific range of coverage for each news media outlet (Consalvo, 2003, endnote 1, p. 41). Her research questions include: What were the central themes about the killings that the media outlets emphasized? How were the murderers and The Trench Coat Mafia portrayed in terms of their interests and their social position within the high school? Was race an issue in the coverage? If so, how? Was masculinity an issue in the coverage? If so, how (p. 28-29)? This article provided me with a criminological case study analysis of the print and television news reporting of the Columbine High School shootings, and the media construction of boys and masculinity following this horrific event. However, I am interested in examining the representations of gender, specifically femininity, in the re-enactments of cases on *Deadly Women*. This therefore departs from Consalvo's (2003) focus on masculinity, crime and the media. This led me towards studies that more specifically utilized feminist and/or critical gender studies approaches (see, for instance, Jermyn, 1996; Morrissey, 2003).

Deborah Jermyn (1996) carried out a feminist appropriation of the female psychopath to attend to a major gap in feminist film criticism, in which this figure has received almost no detailed critical attention and has generally been dismissed as a

reactionary representation of single or independent women (p. 251). She examined characters and scenes in *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992), and *Single White Female* (1992) to demonstrate how the preferred or dominant reading may be read in an oppositional or 'against the grain' manner (p. 255-266). As she states, "…appropriation demands that one recovers moments of resistance and disruption for an alternative reading" of the text(s) being studied (Jermyn, 1996, p. 266). To uncover an alternative reading of the text(s), one must deal with a lot of thoroughly mainstream or conventional studies and then apply marginalized critiques and concepts (p. 267). One must examine and unpack what is or may be hidden or overlooked in mainstream or conventional scholarship. As Jermyn (1996) states regarding these films, "There is nothing inherently marginal about the 'female concerns' these films look at; it is only that our culture has designated them marginal. Thus, the act of appropriation itself is an act of resistance" (p. 267). Although Jermyn (1996) deals specifically with films, I found her explanation of the method of feminist appropriation especially valuable given the critical gender studies theoretical lens of my thesis. Jermyn (1996) describes how to critically engage with, examine and unpack the characters and scenes in visual media forms, in a way that reveals alternative or resistive readings of texts that may otherwise be considered reactionary or non-feminist by viewers of those texts. To be clear, though I did not specifically build on this methodology, I found it helpful in making me more critically aware of how to approach and engage with the *Deadly Women* case 'texts' I examined in this project.

In her work on women and media, Belinda Morrissey (2003) questions why people in general are so reluctant to believe that women can intend to kill. Through case

studies of female murderers from Canada, the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, she examines how these killers are constructed in the media, law and feminist discourses almost always as victims rather than as agentic actors in their violent crimes. Morrissey (2003) argues that by denying the possibility of female agency in violent crimes, feminist scholars are actually denying women the full freedom to be human (quote from the book's back cover).

Morrissey (2003) writes "metanarratives" about the media, legal and feminist discourses under study, analyzing "each discourse and narrative through the lens of another, seeing them as they are not self-consciously intended to be seen" (p. 3). Her study is thus necessarily interdisciplinary, including mainstream and feminist legal and media theory, psychoanalysis, philosophy, semiotics, narratology and communication studies (p. 4). Morrissey (2003) provides alternative understandings of female violence and agency from those currently dominant in the media, legal and feminist discourses under study, in part by arguing that all representations of female murderers merit examination (p. 7).

Morrissey (2003) highlighted the importance of analyzing female violent agency and subjectivity in the discourses she examined. I also found this to be an important focal point in the cases I analyzed on *Deadly Women*. I applied two of the agency denial techniques she outlined (p. 25), in my analysis of Aileen Wuornos's monsterization and Ashley Humphrey's victimism or victimized femininity enactment on this series. Furthermore, Morrissey (2003) dedicated a chapter to Wuornos' case, which she viewed as an example of the processes of subjectivity construction in the discourses under study (p. 28). This chapter also showed the effectiveness of using Morrissey's own model of a

narrated and performed subjectivity (2003, p. 28). I used several aspects of Morrissey's analysis of Wuornos' case (2003, p. 30-66) to build on my own analysis of this case as represented on *Deadly Women*.

The above studies all inspired me with some ideas regarding how to approach my project methodologically. However, I decided to conduct a "close textual analysis" (Van O'Connor, 1949; Richter, 2007, p. 749-763), aided by my critical gender studies theoretical framework, of typical episodes of *Deadly Women*. Critics using this method conduct close, detailed readings of the text under study via elucidating its tropes or criteria (Richter, 2007, p. 750). This was a process I found especially helpful in the process of creating and studying my episode summaries of *Deadly Women*. Close textual analysis also emphasizes the importance of the structure of the text in contributing to the text's total meaning. Methods of organizing the elements of the text also contribute to its meaning (Van O'Connor, 1949, p. 492), some of which are of particular relevance to my thesis, as I explain further below. Thus, I chose this particular approach over the others summarized above.

Close textual analysis (or close reading) was a method used by practioners of the New Criticism, including I.A. Richards and W.K. Wimsatt, as the basis for literary criticism (see Van O'Connor, 1949). The New Criticism school is a continuation of ninteenth century English criticism and borrows from more contemporary anthropology, psychology and philosophy (Van O'Connor, 1949, p. 490).

Such critics focus their attention on the literary work itself; examine the various issues rising from studying relationships between a subject matter and the final form of the work; and consider how the moral and philosophical elements get into or are related

to the literary work (Van O'Connor, 1949, p. 489). The New Criticism adheres more to the literary work itself than to the biographical or social origins of the work, and also develops criteria to make potential judgements regarding literary worth (Van O'Connor, 1949, p. 489; see also Richter, 2007, p. 749). Such criteria includes tension, ambiguity, paradox, irony and so on (Van O'Connor, 1949, p. 490; Richter, 2007, p. 750, 757-758). Critics decode the text by explicating its tropes or criteria through close readings of the work itself (see Richter, 2007, p. 750).

The New Criticism disputes the dichotomy of content and form, in arguing that there is no true separation between these terms in literature (Van O'Connor, 1949, p. 492). Rather, the structure of the work contributes to its "total meaning" (Van O'Connor, 1949, p. 492). One of I.A. Richards' main concerns is the total meaning of the work. Parts of the total meaning include meter, diction, metaphor, and so forth. Various methods of organizing the elements of the work also contribute to its meaning, and are of particular relevance to my own project. These methods include "…the incidental ironies, the juxtaposing of unlike elements, the bringing together of homogeneous elements,…and so forth" (Van O' Connor, 1949, p. 492).

In the process of viewing episodes of *Deadly Women*, I found it helpful to take notes on the case portrayals to refer back to if and when I needed to. I found it easier to transcribe the narration, 'expert' testimony, and the scenes into a written 'script' of the case portrayal, than to always have to refer back to the original televisual format. I only had access to the episodes not taped on PVR for a limited amount of time, thus I had to write down the pertinent details in order to have them as reference material. By creating such 'scripts' or texts, I was able to then read the case portrayals multiple times. In these

re-readings, I noted the overall structure of the text; repetitions of words, phrases or scenes emphasized by the 'experts' (such as Wuornos as "the monster"); juxtapositions of unlike elements (such as Coit's deadly female masculinity and her dangerous seductive femininity); and the synthesizing of similar elements (such as Ashley Humphrey's victimized femininity encompassing and including her racialized murder disguise).

By selecting close textual analysis as my method, I was able to conduct close, detailed readings of the *Deadly Women* case portrayal texts through revealing and explaining each texts' criteria or tropes (Richter, 2007, p. 750). These tropes were informed by my critical gender studies theoretical framework. Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) theory of non-foundational, non-essentialist, performative gender identity helped in highlighting the transformative nature of the gendered representations on this series, particularly from non-criminal to murderess. Since there are no 'natural' gender identities, it is possible to perform one's gender in ways that subvert, parody or displace the hegemonic, heterosexual model of cultural intelligibility (Butler, 1990, p. 208, note 6). Performativity theory also provides the theoretical 'backbone' of all the cases analyzed, since these actual killers are all portrayed by actors on *Deadly Women*. R.W. Connell (1995, 2002) argues that there are multiple masculinities and femininities. She provides a framework through which to understand how women and men perform these gender expressions. Judith Halberstam (1998) uses female masculinity to explore a queer subject position that can challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity, as well as recognize and sanction alternatively gendered bodies and subjectivities (p. 8-9). The female killers portrayed on this series—particularly Jill Coit—can be viewed as performing a version of female masculinity in committing their crimes. Ann Lloyd's

(1995) doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis provided a way to analyze whether the criminal justice system resolutions of the cases (as well as their overall portrayal) on *Deadly Women* could be viewed as harsh or lenient. Lloyd (1995) also describes eight androcentric/misogynistic tropes of violent women, which I applied to the case portrayal texts when I deemed it appropriate or helpful. Hence, close textual analysis, aided by my critical gender studies theoretical framework, provided benefits over the other methodologies summarized above.

The following subsection addresses my specific research procedure for my analysis of the television series *Deadly Women*. Here, I also outline my choice of the three cases analyzed in this thesis. Performativity theory, as a crucial component within my combinatory critical gender studies framework, is also outlined and discussed.

Analysis of *Deadly Women*

My project examines how female murderers are represented in the television show *Deadly Women*. I analyzed a random sample of thirteen episodes from seasons two through four taped on PVR in 2012, and then completed a more detailed analysis of seasons five and six. This combined sample consisted of fifty-four episodes. However, upon further investigation, I discovered that episode one of season five was not a typical episode of *Deadly Women*. This "*Deadly Women*: Killer Countdown Special" tallied the 10 Deadliest Women featured on the series in seasons two through four as determined by viewer votes on investigationdiscovery.com. The special episode included clips from these female killer's segments as the countdown progressed (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Deadly_Women_episodes). Therefore, I

purposefully deleted this special countdown episode from my sample of typical episodes of *Deadly Women*.

Out of the remaining sample of fifty-three episodes, I was able to obtain and view forty-six. Due to technological difficulties in acquiring episodes, as well as time constraints, I was not able to view seven episodes, all from season six. These episodes included: “Hunting Humans” (episode 1); “Parents Peril” (episode 2); “Teen Terror” (episode 9); “Kinky Killers” (episode 13); “Mommy’s Little Helpers” (episode 15); “Eternal Revenge” (episode 16); and “Death Knock” (episode 19). However, judging from the titles of these episodes and from their Wikipedia synopses, these particular episodes appear to reiterate common themes portrayed within my overall sample. For instance, adolescent killers (‘teen terrors’) have also been portrayed in “Young Blood” (season 3, episode 1), “Baby-Faced Killers” (season 5, episode 15), “Deadly Delinquents” (season 5, episode 18), and “Killer Kids” (season 5, episode 20). Furthermore, killings motivated by revenge have also been portrayed in “Lover’s Revenge” (season 5, episode 17) and “Ruthless Revenge” (season 6, episode 11), to name but a few of the most obvious examples. The omission of episodes was somewhat of an aggravation at the start of this project, but was ultimately necessary.

Deadly Women is important, and distinct from other television shows, since it centres on dangerous women and is based solely upon representations of female killers. *Deadly Women* is also important because it dramatizes actual cases of female murderers. *Deadly Women* provides a way to understand how women, particularly violent women, are depicted enacting or performing their gender in a specific way, and as having deviated from social norms regarding ‘appropriate’ femininity.

I conducted my analysis through creating episode summaries as I viewed each one. These episode summaries included scene descriptions; expert testimony/narration descriptions; the overall format of the episode; the names of the killer(s) and victim(s); descriptions of the murder(s); the criminal justice system resolutions of the cases; as well as how each killer was portrayed (the evil monster, female masculinity, woman as victim, and so forth). During this initial viewing stage, I paid particular attention to those cases that emerged as exemplars of my critical gender studies theoretical framework. I then narrowed my sample to three cases that exemplified particular ways of understanding female killers, as represented on the television series *Deadly Women*. The first viewing aimed to capture the gist of the storyline of the case, the expert testimony and narration, as well as the actors' performances and scenes. More detailed viewings were conducted to focus on the narration and expert testimony, and then the scenes and actors' portrayal of the actual individuals involved in the case (killers, victims, accomplices, criminal justice system personnel, and so forth). I also conducted additional viewings as needed to concentrate on representations of the femininity/masculinity of the killers, race/ethnicity, class, and any other potential sites of theoretical interest in the specific case. These three cases are deviations from the cultural norm of what constitutes 'proper' femininity, and thus can be viewed as particular performativities of (violent) transgressions of this gendered social norm.

I chose these three case representations because they all have multiple and nuanced points of interest within them that make them more interesting both for academic research and for audiences. Particular female killers and their media representations are a complex issue for scholars and practitioners within pertinent fields

such as the criminal justice system. Hence, such cases are fascinating since there is no single, simplistic way or terms to employ to explain or understand this social and gendered issue. In terms of my thesis, Aileen Wuornos, I argue, best represents the duality between monster and victim. The lack of discussion on *Deadly Women* regarding Jill Coit's (deadly) female masculinity as depicted in her masculine disguise for Boggs' murder—specifically the obviously fake moustache she dons to commit this crime—is interesting, though I do not know for sure why the 'experts' on this show do not discuss such a costume further. Lastly, Ashley Humphrey's victimized femininity enactment also includes a racialized aspect, thus distinguishing her case portrayal from the other female killers who can also be viewed as fitting Lloyd's (1995) "woman as victim" trope. I thus chose these three cases to analyze further, since I found them intellectually fascinating on a sociological, criminological and feminist/gender studies level. *Deadly Women* generally represents female killers as monstrous; seductive manipulators; victimized or easily manipulated into crime; and/or as mentally ill. Although the issue of mental illness and pathologization of female criminality is fascinating, it brings in an individualistic, psychological discourse that departs from the theoretical framework of this thesis project. Hence, I did not delve into the psychologized representations of such killers on this series. The three cases analyzed in this thesis are viewed as the portrayals that best exemplify the general representative 'categories' of female killers on *Deadly Women*.

The interactions among axes of inequality (in this case, race and gender) are important to this thesis project. Connell (1995) argues that we must examine the relations between masculinities (and femininities), and unpack the milieus of race and class and inspect the gender relations operating within them (p. 76). I will now provide the racial

demographics of the female killers portrayed in my sample of forty-six typical episodes of *Deadly Women*. Counting female duos as individual female murderers, 90.97% of the killers portrayed in my sample were Caucasian (131), 5.56% were Black (8), 0.69% were Asian (1), 2.08% were Hispanic/Latina (3), and 0.69% were Middle-Eastern (1 Egyptian-born). Aileen Wuornos, Jill Coit and Ashley Humphrey were all counted as Caucasian. Although author Steven Singular notes on the episode that "she *thought* she had a little bit of Native American blood in her" (my emphasis), Jill Coit looks white, and this was the only reference to such possible heritage in her case portrayal. I counted Jill Coit as white, since she not only looks Caucasian but is also represented consistently throughout her depiction as a deceptive manipulator. The preponderance of white female killers in my sample of typical episodes of *Deadly Women* could imply that murder is primarily a white female phenomenon, in the producers' views. However, it could also simply be a reflection of my sample, and not of the entire series.

In researching gender performativity and the media in regard to female killers, most of the pertinent sources I found applied the concept of performativity to plays (Lorentzen, 2010; Hall Hagen, 2013); the internal and external landscapes and spatiality of serial killers in the United States (Warf & Waddell, 2002); detective and crime fiction novels (Mantymaki, 2011, 2013a, 2013b); and to specific female murderers, such as Aileen Wuornos (Pearson, 2007) and Lizzie Borden (Miller, 2010). My project contributed to this body of knowledge by applying the concept of performativity to a specific television series, *Deadly Women*.

Rob Cover (2004) outlines a methodology whereby characters in television series can be analyzed using performativity theory. This methodology examines how "…the

conventions of media production and, particularly, television narrative, work to enable and constrain the presentation of identities as performative" (p. 1-2). He applies the concept of performativity specifically to the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Cover identifies four major premises of Judith Butler's theory of performative identity that are important for television characters and thus for his analysis (p. 1). Cover's (2004) research procedure involves satisfying each of the four premises identified below using examples obtained from the television narrative under study (p. 2).

There are four factors that must be addressed in examining television character representations through performativity theory (Cover, 2004, p. 3-4). The first is the constitution of characters in language and discourse (p. 4-6), or how the character is performed in terms of the languages and discourses available to the character in the series over a period of more than one episode (p. 3). The second factor involves Butler's non-foundationalist theory of identity (p. 6-10), which is applied to "…questions around episodic closure, continuity and the presentation of coherence to a broad audience, and the ways in which differences of narrative occur across various textual and televisual genres, including the recent development of cross-genre programs" (Cover, 2004, p. 7).

The third factor applies anti-foundationalism to the transformative subject regarding change and development of the performative self of the particular character under study (Cover, 2004, pp. 3, 10-15). The fourth factor is the cultural demand for coherence (p. 15-17), or how

> …the repetition of the character's attributes, moral codes, behaviors, attitudes is a necessity for their own coherence as well as for the coherent presentation to a recurring audience—*yet* the disruption to coherent subject performativity is seen both in the encounter with otherness in individual episodes, and in the *effect* of that encounter in which the subjectivity of the character is altered over the longer term through personality,

character relations, physical and knowledge-based attributes, proficiencies and moral codes of behaviour (Cover, 2004, p. 3).

Cover (2004) also addresses the issue of agency within post-structuralism and Butlerian theory. This can be addressed only within the television show's particular narrative "universe" (pp. 4, 17-18). Cover's (2004) study provides a way to apply performativity theory to a media analysis of a television series. I used his four factors as a reminder of vital points within Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) theory that must be addressed.

In this chapter, I have provided a brief methodological review of the criminological literature on the media and female killers. I have also outlined close textual analysis as my methodology for this thesis project. This analytical method will be aided by my critical gender studies theoretical framework, which is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Gender Performativity and *Deadly Women*

Introduction

Here I examine the representations of female violent crime on the *Deadly Women* television series through a critical gender studies lens. I have 'read' such representations through Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) performativity theory, R.W. Connell's (1995, 2002) notion of multiple masculinities and femininities, Judith Halberstam's (1998) notion of female masculinity, and Ann Lloyd's (1995) doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis.

Judith Butler and Performativity Theory

In this thesis, the concept of gender performativity is used to analyze the actors portraying female killers, rather than the performativity of the actual killers themselves. To be clear, I examine the representations of the murderers on *Deadly Women* specifically, not the actual killers themselves. In either case, each woman (actor and killer) is performing gender in a manner that (re)produces hegemonic and/or alternative 'deviant' gender performances.

Performativity is a rhetorical device for studying how identity is produced in non-foundational and non-essentialist ways. Judith Butler argues that identities are perpetually created and fabricated through their performance. With regard to gender, what it means to be a man or a woman is produced and sustained through acts, mannerisms, clothing, gestures and so forth. Thus, there are no 'natural' gender identities. Rather, gender is what people do, and through performing gender, people reproduce the notion of what gender constitutes (Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2004, p. 348; Butler, 1990).

Judith Butler undertakes a genealogical analysis of the processes whereby identity is constructed within discourse and language (Salih, 2002, p. 10). Butler (1990) provides

that "genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories [sex, gender, desire] that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (p. xxxi, her emphasis). Butler's (1990) feminist genealogy of the category of women and gender ontology positions gender as an effect (see Salih, 2002, p. 48-49). Butler (1990) argues that since there are no 'natural' gender identities, it is possible to enact one's gender in subversive or 'parodic' ways. Butler aims to displace subject categories (such as woman, man, male, female) by revealing how they are discursively constructed within a heterosexual matrix of power. Butler (1990) utilizes the term 'heterosexual matrix' to:

> …designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized…[and] to characterize a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (p. 208, note 6).

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues that (gender) identity is performative. It is an act, the perpetual 'doing' of identity but not a 'doing' by a 'doer' that pre-exists the deed. She asserts that:

> …gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed…There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results (1990, p. 34).

Performativity provides that there is no essential sex or a true or abiding masculinity or femininity. Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity reveals that "the postulation of a true gender identity…[is] a regulatory fiction" (p. 192). Hence, notions of 'natural' gender identities—such as women as passive and nurturing, and men as active and aggressive—can be viewed as regulatory fictions, since they are not only false, but also

assist in the regulation and social control of individuals who violate or transgress such notions (c.f. Lloyd, 1995; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). In this sense, gender can be viewed as a "strategy of survival", since those individuals who do not 'do' their gender correctly are punished by society (Butler, 1990, p. 190; Salih, 2002, p. 66).

Butler (1990) aims to subvert and implode the basis of identity itself through acknowledging that the allegedly 'natural' sex categories are unstable discursive constructions that serve to render masculinity and femininity intelligible (Nayak & Kehily, 2006, p. 460-461). Butler's destabilization of the sex/gender distinction highlights that there is no sex that is not always already gendered and that the body does not pre-exist its cultural inscription. Hence, gender is a particular type of process, yet not a process enacted by a doer that pre-exists the deed (Salih, 2002, p. 62).

Butler (1990) maintains that gender is independent of sex, which she describes as "a free-floating artifice" (p. 9). Thus, men can be feminine, and women can be masculine. In this way, sex is always already gendered, and the sex/gender distinction is not actually a distinction at all. The coherence of these categories is established to perpetuate the system of "compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality" (Salih, 2002, p. 49). Gender identities that deviate from this system reveal how gender norms are socially instituted and maintained. Butler (1990) critiques "the metaphysics of substance" (p. 14), or the widespread notion that sex and the body are unquestionably 'natural', material entities. Rather, Butler argues that sex and gender are 'phantasmatic' cultural constructions that shape and define the body (see Salih, 2002, p. 49). *Gender Trouble* therefore shows that gender is a fictive production and is performative. *Deadly Women* can be viewed as exemplifying gender trouble, in that the series highlights the instability of gender

categories (that is, females enact feminine gender performances) as well as gender's 'fictive' or constructed nature.

In regard to her latter argument, Butler (1990) argues that the body is not a "mute facticity" (p. 176) or a natural fact, but is produced by discourse. Hence, both sex and gender can be performatively reinscribed in ways that highlight their constructedness rather than their facticity (or the fact of their existence). These reinscriptions constitute the subject's agency within the law, or the possibilities of subverting the law against itself. Here, Butler (1990) employs Foucault's "model of inscription" in regards to subject formation and the law. As Butler asserts, this means "[the] law is not literally internalized, but incorporated, with the consequence that bodies are produced which signify that law on and through the body" (1990, p. 183). Since there is no 'interior' to gender, the law cannot be internalized, but is instead written on the body in "the corporeal stylization of gender" (Butler, 1990, p. 184; Salih, 2002, p. 64-65). Butler argues that there is no pre-linguistic core or essence to identity.

Since there is no true or false gender for Butler, it is therefore possible to enact gender in ways that parody the discourse that postulates the primacy and stability of identity. As Butler (1990) states: "If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (p. 186). All gender is a form of parody, yet some gender performances are more parodic than others. These parodic performances, such as drag, reveal the imitative nature of all gender identities. As Butler (1990) asserts, "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as

well as its contingency" (p. 187). It is important to note that Butler's notion of parody does not presume the existence of a primary original that is imitated by parodic identities. Rather, what is parodied is the notion of an original gender identity. Such gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fabricates itself is an imitation with no origin (see Butler, 1990, p. 188). Gender parodic performances that strive to emphasize their genealogy displace heterocentric assumptions through exposing that heterosexual identities are as constructed and derivative as the imitations of them (see Salih, 2002, p. 66). *Deadly Women*, as well as specific cases represented on this series, could possibly be read as parody. Particular gender enactments—such as Jill Coit's masculine disguise and clearly fake moustache donned in the commission of Gerry Boggs' murder—can be read as subverting or parodying the heterosexual matrix of identity. This specific enactment parodies the very notion of an original gender identity, in highlighting the fabricated and comedic nature of Coit's (deadly) female masculinity.

The process of 'doing' identity involves repetition that is regulated by dominant discourses. The site for resistance within performativity is in the displacement of dominant discourse or a "slippage" in the process of repetition (Butler, 1990, p. 30). As Butler (1990) argues, gender is a construction that frequently conceals its origin. The implicit collective agreement to perform, produce and maintain distinct and polar genders is a cultural fiction that is concealed by the credibility of those productions. The possibilities of gender transformation or resistance are in the arbitrary relations between such gendered acts, in the potential of a failure in repetition, or a parodic performance that reveals the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction (see Butler, 1990, p. 190-192). *Deadly Women* can be viewed as a

"slippage" within the process of repetition of 'doing' identity, in that it demonstrates that women are not solely passive, nurturing subjects, but can be active and violent as well.

Although subversion is possible within the power structures that constrain gender, our gender choices and our choices of subversion are also limited rather than free (see Salih, 2002, p. 50-51). As Butler (1990) states, "there is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there" (p. 199). Hence, you must manage with the tools that you already have, modifying them in ways that expose the 'unnatural' nature of gender (Salih, 2002, p. 66). However, if all gender is parodic, what constitutes subversive gender parody? For parody to be subversive, it "…depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered. What performance *where*…will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire" (Butler, 1990, p. 189, my emphasis). Thus, for *Deadly Women* to be viewed as an instance of subversive gender parody, it is important to note where such parodic performances occur, as well as whether the series reinforces *or* destabilizes existing heterosexual power structures or the heterosexual matrix. The depictions of female murderers on *Deadly Women* (as violent, as promiscuous, as lesbian) appear to achieve this destabilization of sex and gender. The series can be read as parody, since it dramatizes and sensationalizes cases of female killers. The actors are often seen staring defiantly, coldly or even vulnerably into the camera, as if into the viewers' souls. Such stares are often conducted in an exaggerated manner, as if to overemphasize the specific emotions to the audience. The representation of Jill Coit's (deadly) female masculinity also can be read as parodying or poking fun at such an alternative gender expression as Halberstam (1998) articulates.

In the next section, I summarize R.W. Connell's (1995, 2002) notion of multiple masculinities and femininities. I also articulate how Connell's framework and definition of masculinities can be applied to the gender enactments represented on *Deadly Women*.

R.W. Connell's Framework of Multiple Masculinities and Femininities

Butler's assertion that there is no true or abiding gender identity leads into R.W. Connell's (1995, 2002) notion of multiple masculinities and femininities. Connell (1995, 2002) argues that there are multiple masculinities and femininities, and we have to understand how women and men perform these masculinities and femininities. Here, I examine the multiple masculinities and femininities of the female killers depicted on *Deadly Women*.

Connell (1995) argues that masculinity and femininity are intrinsically relational concepts that have meaning in relation to each other. This persists across societies and historical periods. Yet, it is gender relations, not masculinity in particular, that constitute a coherent object of knowledge for science. Thus, we must understand gender relations in order to understand masculinity (p. 44). Masculinities are defined as "…configurations of practice structured by gender relations. They are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change" (Connell, 1995, p. 44). Since masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, Connell's definition of masculinities could also apply and be extended to femininities.

Connell's relational approach to the study of gender and masculinity is crucial. She defines gender as "…the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that bring reproductive

distinctions between bodies into social processes" (Connell, 2002, p. 10). The reproductive arena is "…an arena in which bodies are brought into social processes, in which our social conduct does something with reproductive difference" (2002, p. 10). Connell emphasizes the social, historical, and political (not the biological) nature of gender relations and masculinity (see, for instance, Connell, 1995, p. 71-76).

Moreover, Connell (1995) argues that we must examine the relations between masculinities, and unpack the milieus of race and class and analyze the gender relations operating within them (p. 76). Connell's relational approach to masculinity utilizes the concepts of hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalization. Connell's (1995) framework of analyzing specific masculinities studies two types of relationship: "…hegemony, domination/subordination and complicity on the one hand, marginalization/authorization on the other" (p. 81). Connell's terms designate "…configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships" (1995, p. 81). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "…the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 1995, p. 77). This applies to cases or episodes of *Deadly Women* in which the female killer is depicted as being subordinate to a man. For instance, in "Under His Control" (Season 4 (2010), episode 10), the female killers portrayed were coerced into committing murder by a man.

Subordinate masculinity may refer to those masculinities that are not culturally dominant in society as a whole, at the particular point in time under study (Connell, 1995, p. 78). Connell (1995) refers specifically to the subordination of homosexual

masculinities (p. 78). She argues that from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity, "…gayness is easily assimilated to femininity," which may, in turn, justify oppression and homophobic attacks (Connell, 1995, p. 78). While this may be the most obvious example, there are other subordinated masculinities that are also clearly equated with femininity, as demonstrated in the list of verbal insults Connell provides (1995, p. 79). This term applies to depictions of violent women as well as lesbian/bisexual/trans women on *Deadly Women*, since these women do not fit into the current hegemonic view of femininity. Such a perspective is based on women being deemed passive, nurturing, and other traits commonly or traditionally held of women. Furthermore, specific cases on *Deadly Women* also fit into a 'subordinate' femininity definition.

Few men fully fit the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. However, the majority of men benefit from its hegemony, insofar as they derive some advantage from the overall subordination of women (Connell, 1995, p. 79). Connell (1995) avers that "masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense" (p. 79). Such masculinities are not merely "slacker versions of hegemonic masculinity," but can be covertly hazardous to gender relations in 'playing along' with hegemonic ideals yet not doing anything substantial to resolve gender issues (Connell, 1995, p. 79-80).

In Connell's (1995) framework, marginalization refers to the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinate classes or ethnic groups. Marginalization is always related to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group; yet, this relation may also exist between subordinated masculinities (p. 80-81). This applies to the 'subordinate' femininities (as violent, deadly, lesbian) depicted on *Deadly*

Women. *Deadly Women* adopts a 'marginalized' perspective, in acknowledging that although men commit murder more often than women, both sexes can be and are deadly. However, *Deadly Women* also adopts a 'subordinate' perspective, in arguing that some women can be violent just like men and are thus not subordinate to men.[3] For instance, the episode entitled "Master Manipulators" (Season 4 (2010), episode 6) depicts female killers who enticed men to commit murder or lured men to their deaths. Overall, *Deadly Women* is sensationalistic, but generally the series provides criminal justice system resolutions to the cases depicted.

Since masculinity and femininity have meanings in relation to each other, my project has applied Connell's (1995, 2002) relational approach to masculinities to the notion of multiple femininities (hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, marginalized). Yet, Connell (1995) does not examine the overlap between masculinity and femininity, in that some men can be and are feminine and some women can be and are masculine. This leads me to Judith Halberstam's (1998) notion of female masculinity, which is the topic of the subsequent section. The female killers depicted on *Deadly Women*—particularly Jill Coit, as I argue further below—can be viewed as enacting or performing a form of female masculinity in committing their murderous acts.

Judith Halberstam and Female Masculinity

[3] It is possible, using the theories in my framework, to employ the phrase 'subordinate' or 'subordinate femininity' to mean a woman whose gender identity is a minority one (thus subordinate to the dominant expression of gender identity) and *simultaneously* to be dominant in relation to a certain masculine gender identity. For instance, Jill Coit's (deadly) female masculinity on *Deadly Women* is 'subordinate' regarding the current hegemonic expression of femininity. At the same time, Coit is dominant in relation to her accomplice Michael Backus' masculine gender identity. To be clear, violent women can be viewed as 'subordinate' (note the inverted commas) when their murderous acts counter the current hegemonic perspective of femininity as nurturing, passive, and other traits traditionally or commonly held of women. I use the inverted commas throughout this project when necessary to clarify that I am employing Connell's sense of subordination. Moreover, the inverted commas are employed to avoid the contradiction between the idea of subordination and the image of a violent woman.

Halberstam (1998) employs her notion of female masculinity to investigate a queer subject position that can challenge hegemonic models or perspectives of gender conformity, as well as recognize and sanction alternatively gendered subjectivities and bodies (p. 8-9). She argues that masculinity is not solely a male trait, since women can be masculine as well. As Halberstam (1998) claims,

> …far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. In other words, female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing. But what we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies (p. 1-2).

Thus, female masculinity must be examined and sanctioned so as to generate positive social change for all human beings, not solely those individuals and groups whose bodies and subjectivities 'deviate' from traditional gender norms.

Halberstam (1998) notes that female masculinity, at the time of her writing, had been blatantly overlooked in society and in academia. This has sustained the complex social structures that link masculinity to maleness as well as to power and domination (p. 2). Halberstam does not study forms of masculinity that are already well known and thoroughly researched. She aims to add to the body of knowledge through examining the forms of masculinity that seem the most useful and instructive regarding gender relations and positive social change, such as female masculinity (Halberstam, 1998, p. 3). In her analysis, masculinity "…becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body" (p. 2). Halberstam (1998) adopts an interdisciplinary "queer methodology" (p. 9-10, 13) to argue for the production of alternative gender taxonomies (p. 8-9), as well as for "gender transivity" (p. 41). Halberstam (1998) reveals the suppressed or hidden history of female masculinities while arguing for a more

nuanced and inclusive understanding of gender categories that would incorporate, rather than pathologize, such forms of masculinity. The representations of gender and femininity on *Deadly Women* can be understood as enactments of female masculinity (c.f. Halberstam, 1998). For instance, Jill Coit ("Fortune Hunters," Season 4 (2010), episode 3) dresses in a masculine trucker-type disguise when she (and her male accomplice) murder her ex-husband Gerry Boggs. During the commission of this murder, Coit wears a baseball cap, a men's blue jacket and plaid shirt, and an obviously fake handlebar moustache. She is clearly trying (and to some extent failing) to hide her identity as the victim's ex-wife. Yet, why did she feel the need to dress like a man to commit this murder? She might have drawn less attention to herself had she worn a less obviously fake disguise, even if she had simply dressed as she would regularly. A small yet noticeable detail, such as the handlebar moustache, indicates her female masculinity.

In the following subsection, I outline Lloyd's (1995) doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis, as well as her eight androcentric stereotypes of violent women. These tropes will be applied and discussed, when appropriate, to the cases analyzed on the television series *Deadly Women*.

Ann Lloyd's Doubly Deviant, Doubly Damned Hypothesis

Ann Lloyd (1995) argues that women who murder are doubly deviant and thus doubly damned, since they have not only committed a crime but have also violated traditional cultural notions regarding 'appropriate' femininity. In the criminal justice system (a system designed by men for men), women who do not conform to conventional gender stereotypes are at high risk of harsher treatment and sentences, as well as to being judged lacking as women according to hegemonic views pertaining to approved

femininity (back cover). Various prejudices and assumptions, as well as related gender stereotypes, must be considered in the analysis of offenders and their treatment in the criminal justice system. Everyone is influenced by largely unconscious assumptions regarding 'proper' behaviour for women and for men. The strength of such attitudes and assumptions is demonstrated by the way we respond to violent women who, if they do not conform entirely to societal stereotypes for women, are at great risk of being treated harshly (see Lloyd, 1995, p. xix-xx). In my analysis of episodes of *Deadly Women*, I considered two factors: a) the criminal justice system resolutions of the cases and whether these could be viewed as (or are portrayed as) harsh or lenient; and b) whether the series portrays the female killer in a lenient/sympathetic or harsh manner.

Lloyd (1995) describes eight androcentric/misogynistic stereotypes of violent women. These include the good mother; the virgin; the Madonna; the sexual temptress; woman the deceiver; the evil monster; woman as victim; and liberated woman as law-breaker (p. 47-52). Although the three women on *Deadly Women* analyzed in detail below were sentenced appropriately given the particular circumstances of their crimes, the narrative and technical aspects of each of their representations can be viewed as illustrating Lloyd's (1995) hypothesis. These female killers are represented as doubly deviant and doubly damned. Regardless of any sort of sympathy in their portrayals, these three female killers are depicted on a series entitled *Deadly Women*, a program whose very title emphasizes that female killers are doubly deviant, since they are portrayed as having committed violent crimes and as having violated traditional norms regarding culturally approved femininity. They are also doubly damned, since not only do the vast

majority receive psychiatric or criminal justice sentences, but they have also been depicted on a sensationalistic and dramatic television series.

This chapter has outlined the combinatory critical gender studies theoretical framework of this thesis. I will apply and draw on crucial components of this framework throughout the subsequent three analysis chapters. The next chapter examines Aileen Wuornos' performative identity in her portrayal on *Deadly Women* through this framework, and specifically through the technique of "monsterization" (Morrissey, 2003).

Chapter 4: Aileen Wuornos, *Deadly Women*, and Monsterization

Introduction

Aileen Wuornos worked as a hitchhiking prostitute on the highways of Florida. She shot and killed seven men who picked her up and/or solicited her sexual services. For these crimes, she was executed by lethal injection on October 9, 2001. Wuornos is frequently portrayed, in sensationalistic media representations and in academic studies, as "the monster" and as a victim herself of an abusive, troubled life story. This "monsterization" (Morrissey, 2003) and sympathetic portrayal can also be viewed in her case representation on *Deadly Women* ("Predators", Season 2 (2008), episode 6). Yet, Wuornos' own victimhood is never portrayed on *Deadly Women* in a manner that condones her serial murders. Thus, Wuornos' depiction on this series can be viewed as a replication of conventional understandings of female killers. In this chapter, I will be analyzing Wuornos' "monsterization" (Morrissey, 2003) and sympathetic portrayal on *Deadly Women* through the critical gender studies framework outlined in the preceding Theory chapter. Although Wuornos' representation on *Deadly Women* replicates the conventional understandings of female murderers in sensationalistic media accounts and in academic examinations of her case, my own analytical insights and theoretical arguments provide a different view or voice to the extant body of work on Aileen Wuornos, her life, and her crimes.

Deadly Women and Representations of Aileen Wuornos

I will focus more on Wuornos' "monsterization" (Morrissey, 2003) in her representation on *Deadly Women*, since the experts on the episode generally provide this

normative, heterosexual view of female killers as monstrous and predatory in their crimes. The discussions of Wuornos' distressing life story in this episode function as "windows into her traumatic past" (Pearson, 2007, p. 265) that are incorporated into Wuornos' representation as a female killer and thus assist in 'monsterizing' her. Morrissey (2003) discusses representations of female killers that deny the human agency of the murderess in question. This is accomplished through three techniques: vilification/monsterization, mythification and victimism (p. 25). As Morrissey (2003) states:

> Vilification/monsterization denies agency by insisting upon the evil nature of the murderess, thus causing her to lose humanity. She is transformed into a monster from outside society threatening the mainstream, rather than one of its members, produced and enabled by her social and cultural milieu. The agency denial which takes place in this technique is specifically that of *human* agency. The murderess is considered to have acted, but not as a human woman (p. 25, her emphasis).

Monsterization thus not only dehumanizes the female killer, but also 'others' and distances her from society and its 'normal' members. The murderess is not one of 'us' or similar to 'us' in any significant way, but rather has acted in an evil and violent manner that differentiates her in terms of both humanity and womanhood. These aspects of monsterization will be explained further below, in the analysis of how gender is performed in this case representation on this television series.

The retelling of Wuornos' troubled life story on *Deadly Women* is provided to demonstrate that Wuornos did not really stand a chance of having a 'normal' life and of not becoming a serial killer.[4] This deterministic view of Wuornos' tumultuous

[4] To be clear, I do not think that particular life events that people (such as Wuornos) experience inevitably lead to their becoming a serial killer. Rather, such abusive, detrimental life events may increase the likelihood of future violent behaviour of such individuals. Everyone has a choice in their actions, but some individuals' choices are limited or constrained by their detrimental life circumstances, socio-economic backgrounds, and so forth.

background (and of the seeming inevitability of her becoming a killer) evokes Butler's problematic notion of agency, since there is no 'actor' that pre-exists the acts that effectively constitute gender identity (see Salih, 2002, p. 51; Butler, 1990, p. 34; Nelson, 1999). I view Wuornos' agency as limited due to her abusive upbringing and lack of professional and interpersonal skills, which limited how much "choice" or "chance" Wuornos had to live a 'normal' life. This does not in any way condone her crimes. Wuornos did not have to kill people, but she did not have the requisite means or skills to financially support herself and/or to maintain a healthy romantic relationship. Homicide detective Taylor and criminal profiler DeLong attest to this specific discursive lens on female killers and limited agency. In the context of his testimony about the allegations of sexual abuse in Wuornos' early life, Taylor states: "…If you start from the time that she was just a young child, she just didn't really get that fair shake in life." DeLong then presents the effect of maternal deprivation on a child: "Children that suffer [this] in their early years, the chances of them having something *profoundly…wrong* in adult life is, is great. It's probably 35 to 40 percent" (her emphasis). Taylor later concludes that: "Anyone can be a killer. It's about making choices, she made choices to kill." Such a limited degree of agency (as also evidenced in the conclusion to Wuornos' portrayal) decreases the effectiveness of Wuornos' "monsterization" on *Deadly Women*, since she is considered to have acted according to her own volition.

On *Deadly Women*, Wuornos' performative identity as "the monster" or "predator" (or her monstrous predatory femininity) is privileged over the discourse of her own victimhood. Wuornos' gender enactment on this series is performatively constituted by the 'expressions'—such as the repetitions of Wuornos' "monstrosity"—that are said to

be its results (Butler, 1990, p. 34). Wuornos is explicitly called "the monster" four times during the segment about her on *Deadly Women*, two of which fall into the more detailed discussion of Wuornos' victimhood. Hence, the show cannot let the audience forget (at these opportune moments) Wuornos' monstrous femininity even though the narrative of her own victimhood is now being further elaborated upon. Such juxtapositions also stress that *Deadly Women*'s depiction of her fits a 'subordinate' femininity definition (Connell, 1995, p. 78). 'Subordination' in this sense applies to depictions of violent and lesbian women on *Deadly Women*, since these women do not fit into the present hegemonic view of femininity. Such a perspective is based on women as passive, nurturing, gentle, demure, and other traits commonly or traditionally held of women. On *Deadly Women*, Wuornos enacts a form of monstrous predatory femininity. She is primarily portrayed as a violent, aggressive "monster" or "predator." Even when acknowledging Wuornos' own victimhood, the narrator often quickly returns to Wuornos' monstrosity. Thus, Wuornos' representation on *Deadly Women* as a violent 'monster' (and to a lesser extent as a lesbian) fits this 'subordinate' femininity definition. She is portrayed as quite the opposite of the hegemonic view of femininity as above.

Moreover, the privileging of Wuornos' "monsterization" on *Deadly Women* emphasizes that Wuornos is doubly deviant, yet not doubly damned. Wuornos is doubly deviant in breaking the law and in violently deviating from the conventional cultural norms of 'proper' femininity and feminine behaviour. Wuornos' frequent designation on *Deadly Women* as "the monster" is a technique of 'othering' and dehumanizing this female killer, thus making it easier for the audience to view her execution as neither harsh nor lenient but rather as appropriate (see Lloyd, 1995). Despite Wuornos' own

victimhood, she still killed seven men and thus the death sentence she received can be viewed as appropriate. Yet, Wuornos' depiction on the "Predators" episode ultimately reinforces her "monsterization" (Morrissey, 2003), which thus dehumanizes Wuornos and renders her portrayal on *Deadly Women* harsh. Such 'othering' or de-emphasizing of opposing explanations for violent crimes by the media—repetitions of Wuornos as "the monster" even during discussions of her own victimhood on *Deadly Women*—demonstrates how profoundly distressing our culture views such counter narratives regarding violent crime (Jewkes, 2011, p. 273).

Three Points of Interest in Wuornos' Case Portrayal

There are three intriguing aspects to Wuornos' "monsterization" on *Deadly Women*. First, Wuornos is monstrous in violating the traditional socio-cultural notions of 'appropriate' femininity, as a violent woman. Second, Wuornos' 'unusualness' as a female killer makes her stand out in the discourse surrounding violent criminals and their crimes. Lastly, Wuornos transgressed the conventional notion of the victimized prostitute (or prostitute as victim) through her active and violent acts as a serial-killing prostitute on Florida's highways.

These three aspects of Wuornos' "monstrosity" are evident in the introduction to Wuornos' representation on *Deadly Women*. The narrator presents Wuornos' case thusly: "Of all America's deadly women, there is one who stands out." Criminal profiler DeLong then presents one discursive view of why Wuornos stands out: "[She] was the first female predatory killer that the FBI had ever seen. Female *predatory* killers are very rare" (her emphasis). This statement highlights Wuornos' unusualness among female killers. The narrator then states: "She becomes known as the Monster, for a reason." Highlighting

Wuornos' 'monstrosity' as a (violent) woman, author Sue Russell then remarks that "[t]o actually go out and kill strangers, I think that it's enormously frightening to men. The idea of being with a woman who suddenly can do that is quite frightening." Wuornos, as a woman who went out and murdered strangers, thus violently transgressed conventional norms and codes of 'proper' femininity, especially for men who are represented as 'the norm' in society. Wuornos' serial killings thus positioned her as a deadly threat to the norm, to men and to mainstream heteropatriarchy (Hart, 1994, cited in Morrissey, 2003, p. 37-38). The introduction to Wuornos' depiction then pivots to her prostitution. As the narrator states: "[She] works as a prostitute, plying her trade on the highways of Florida. The endless parade of vehicles provides plenty of opportunities, and plenty of risk." Homicide detective Taylor then offers a conventional view of prostitution: "This is a very dangerous profession. You're only one trick away from getting robbed, raped, killed." The narrator concludes: "No one knows how often Wuornos herself was a victim…But in the winter of 1989, she turns the tables and starts a killing spree that stuns the nation." Hence, Wuornos also violated the traditional notion of prostitutes as victims or as victimized, since she was a serial-killing prostitute.

On *Deadly Women*, Wuornos violently deviates from the conventional social code of 'ideal' feminine gender expressions, in stalking Florida's highways for johns and random victims and viciously murdering seven of these men. This evokes Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity. Performativity provides that there is no essential sex nor a stable or 'natural' or 'unnatural' gender. Thus, notions of 'natural' or 'true' gender identities—such as women as nurturing and passive, and men as aggressive and active—can be viewed as regulatory fictions (Butler, 1990, p. 192), since they are not only false,

but also aid in the regulation and social control of persons who violate such notions (c.f. Lloyd, 1995; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006). Hence, Wuornos must be punished for her violent transgressions of the conventional codes of approved femininity, as enacted through her serial murders as a highway prostitute. Schmid (2005) discusses Wuornos' refusal to act in an 'proper' feminine manner and how this contributed to her monsterization. Although Wuornos seems to confirm the stereotype of the violent lesbian, she is still held to the confining codes of femininity that are applied to all women, despite their sexual orientation. Her refusal to act in an 'appropriate' female manner increased public hostility towards her, as well as lessened the amount of individuals or groups fighting for her life once she had declared her determination to be executed (Schmid, 2005, p. 240). In discussing the 'trouble' Wuornos poses to feminism and queer cultural politics, Pearson (2007) studies feminists' struggle to fit Wuornos into a clean case, since Wuornos does not meet the justice system's demand for vulnerability and imminent danger in cases of female killers. Hence, this may be why anti-death penalty organizations did not work on her case, and why self-defence pleas of Wuornos and some feminists could be rendered incomprehensible (p. 257). This may explain why self-defence is not mentioned during the episode on *Deadly Women*, since she is not depicted, during the commission of her crimes, as vulnerable and in imminent danger.

Thus, Wuornos' violations of the conventional cultural norms of approved femininity also destabilize the sex/gender distinction, in which females enact feminine gender performances (see Butler, 1990, p. 208, note 6).[5] Butler (1990) argues that sex

[5] Such a destabilization of the heterosexual matrix thus evokes the notion of female masculinity (Halberstam, 1998). As Halberstam (1998) argues, masculinity is not solely a male trait, since women can also be masculine. Masculinity is not reducible to only the male body and its effects (p. 1). As such, female masculinity is not an "imitation of maleness," but rather it offers a glimpse of "…how masculinity is

and gender are illusory cultural constructions that shape and define the body (see Salih, 2002, p. 49). Hence, gender is a fictive production and is performative (Butler, 1990). Wuornos' enactment of monstrous predatory femininity on *Deadly Women* exemplifies gender trouble, since it highlights that gender categories are unstable social constructions that regulate how humans perform their gender in a culturally intelligible manner. Wuornos' violent transgression of such codes of behaviour in her serial murders emphasizes the instability of such normative, heterosexual, gendered ideals (see, for instance, Schmid, 2005, p. 232-233).

Wuornos' enactment of monstrous predatory femininity thus parodies the hegemonic, heterosexual discourse of culturally intelligible gender identity (see Butler, 1990, p. 186). All gender is a form of parody; yet the more parodic gender enactments reveal the imitative nature of all gender identities, regardless of sexual orientation. There is no primary gender identity after which parodic identities fashion themselves, since this would hold to the notion of a foundational identity which Butler objects to. Rather, what is parodied is the notion of an original gender identity (see Butler, 1990, p. 188). In this sense, Wuornos' characterization parodies the notion of 'appropriate' womanhood—as being nurturing, passive, and so on—through enacting a form of monstrous predatory femininity. This in turn highlights that the original identity that gender fashions itself after is an "imitation without an origin" (Butler, 1990, p. 188).

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constructed as masculinity" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 1). Thus, female masculinities are "…framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing. But what we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 1-2). Wuornos' 'subordinate' femininity on *Deadly Women* blurs the distinctions between 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviour, in emphasizing that women can also be violent, thus both sexes are deadly. Hence, Wuornos' depiction can be viewed as an enactment of female masculinity. Yet, Jill Coit's representation on *Deadly Women*, as I argue in the next chapter, provides the clearest example of female masculinity. Coit is depicted as an otherwise feminine woman who commits Gerry Boggs' murder while disguised in men's oversize clothing and an obviously fake handlebar moustache.

Wuornos' enactment of monstrous predatory femininity is thus an instance of (somewhat) subversive gender parody, since it displaces dominant discourses (Butler, 1990, p. 30, 190-192) regarding what are culturally appropriate feminine acts and behaviour. Wuornos' gender performativity on *Deadly Women* demonstrates that women are not only passive and nurturing subjects, but can be active and violent as well. Yet, the discussion of Wuornos' own victimhood and troubled life story (somewhat) mitigates the subversive/resistive quality of her gender enactment here. Although such discussion never condones Wuornos' serial murders, it nevertheless is a slippage in the process of repetition of Wuornos' monstrous predatory femininity. Wuornos' enactment of monstrous predatory femininity is thus subversive since it destabilizes the heterosexual matrix. Her depiction—of monstrous predatory femininity, of prostitute as serial killer and, to a lesser extent, of a lesbian—destabilizes sex and gender through depicting her violent transgressions of the conventional cultural codes of approved womanhood, namely her cruel murders of seven men (see Butler, 1990, p. 189).

Another intriguing aspect of Wuornos' monsterization on *Deadly Women* is how her distinctiveness as a female killer makes her stand out in the discourse on such violent criminals and their crimes. As the narrator states, Wuornos is "…the one who stands out" among "…all [of] America's deadly women." Schmid (2005) analyzes elements of Wuornos' exceptionality in true crime novel accounts of her crimes. Wuornos' role as a violent lesbian counters the assumed mutual exclusivity of femininity and violence (p. 229). Thus, Wuornos is not a woman (Schmid, 2005, p. 229-233), since she is not only violent, but is also a lesbian. As Schmid (2005) argues, a violent lesbian violates the code of womanhood even more seriously (p. 229) than does a woman who does not commit

such a double transgression of 'appropriate' femininity. Yet, Wuornos' (violent) lesbianism is presented on *Deadly Women* in the discussion of potential motives for her murders. The language of motives is out of scope for my project, since I am interpreting how Wuornos performs a specific identity through the *Deadly Women* television series, and not the 'realities' of the Wuornos case. Schmid (2005) views the violent lesbian argument as only a partial explanation or means to situate Wuornos in true crime accounts (p. 230-231).

Yet, the positioning of DeLong's viewpoint directly following the narrator's statement that Wuornos "stands out," privileges such a discursive stance on Wuornos' 'unusualness.' However, Schmid (2005) contests such discursive claims to Wuornos' 'originary' status. Wuornos is unusual compared with other female serial killers not because she was the 'first' one, but because she appears to kill 'like a man': "…she killed outdoors rather than at home; she used a gun rather than poison; she killed strangers rather than friends or family members; whatever her motive was, it was definitely not financial" (Schmid, 2005, p. 231). This last point counters author Sue Russell and the narrator's discussion of Wuornos' possible financial motives for murder.

Russell's argument for why Wuornos is known as 'the monster' highlights how Wuornos threatens and destabilizes the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990, p. 208, note 6), as argued above. Hence, Wuornos transgresses the boundaries of 'proper' femininity in her active and violent murders, but also in *how* she committed these crimes. She is 'monstrous' in being a violent woman, as well as in the ways she committed these murders (see Schmid, 2005, p. 231). Schmid (2005) concurs with this assessment in his discussion of how Wuornos does not fit into the roles often reserved for women in true

crime serial killer narratives, since she acted alone and not as a female accomplice to a male killer (p. 232). He notes that female accomplices in such discourses are usually depicted as either a passive victim or as the dominant, more deviant partner. Since Wuornos did not depend on such stereotypes of femininity in order to explain her murders, she is a threat to the prevailing sex/gender system (Schmid, 2005, p. 232-233).[6]

Finally, I argue that Wuornos is 'monstrous' as a prostitute, since she turned the conventional notion of prostitutes as victims or as victimized on its head, through her murders as a serial-killing prostitute. Connell's (1995) definition of hegemonic masculinity relates to this argument. Wuornos, as she is represented on this program, resisted the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women in the patriarchal profession of prostitution by killing seven men who gave her car rides and/or paid for her sexual services. Prostitution is a very dangerous profession, with many (often female) prostitutes becoming victims of sexual assault, theft and homicide (see, for instance, Pearson, 2007, p. 260). Wuornos' portrayal as a serial-killing prostitute twists these conventional beliefs of the victimized prostitute and of culturally sanctioned passive and nurturing femininity. She thus violently flips the notion of subordinate femininity (as above), by actively plying her sexual services on Florida's highways and then murdering seven men who transported her and/or solicited her services.

Schmid (2005) analyzes whether Wuornos' crimes could be better understood by situating them in a tradition of women's resistance to male violence (p. 233-237), since she was a prostitute who killed some of her johns. Since Wuornos' explanation of self-defence is considered unacceptable by law enforcement and true crime dominant

[6] For more on how women's violence poses a threat to patriarchal society in challenging the naturalness of the hegemonic gender dualism of that society, see, for instance, Boyle, 2005, p. 100; and Hart, 1994, cited in Morrissey, 2003, p. 37-38, 180 note 7.

discourses, other motives and explanations must be found (Schmid, 2005, p. 234-235).[7] This is supported by Wuornos' representation on *Deadly Women*. In the segment on Wuornos, there is no explicit mention of this self-defence explanation, nor even a depiction of it in the scenes portrayed. Although Wuornos is depicted killing a man shown attempting to force her to drink from his flask, a close-up shot (earlier in this same scene) of Wuornos' hand grasping the pistol in her bag counters the possibility of this being self-defence. This close-up shot of Wuornos' hand grasping her gun in her bag, before any sort of provocation on the man's part, demonstrates Wuornos' preparing herself to kill if need be. There is no explanation of why she felt the need to ready herself to kill this man. He had not yet at this point done anything to provoke her, apart from driving his vehicle into the deserted rest-stop area and parking it. This appears to support Schmid's (2005) argument above that such dominant discourses deem Wuornos' account of self-defence unacceptable and thus other motives must be found (p. 234-235). Schmid (2005) ultimately rejects both robbery and enjoyment of killing as motives for Wuornos' murders (p. 235-236), which are both discussed on *Deadly Women*. He then discusses how Wuornos' victims are portrayed in a more positive light, in order to bolster the image of Wuornos as a predator and monster (Schmid, 2005, p. 237). Troy Burress' "ideal victim" (Nils Christie, 1986, cited in Newburn, 2007, p. 342-344) portrayal on *Deadly Women* supports this last point.

Wuornos' Performance of Gender

Although Wuornos is not depicted wearing an actual disguise or costume on *Deadly Women*, she does pose as a Damsel in Distress on the side of the highway to lure

[7] For more on counter narratives and explanations regarding female violent crime, see also, for instance, Morrissey, 2003, p. 37-39, and Jewkes, 2011, p. 273.

male drivers to stop and assist her in some way. Wuornos' posing as a stranded motorist or hitchhiker allowed her to gain access to traditional heterosexual womanhood, and thus she embodies hyperfemininity (Pearson, 2007, p. 261-262). Such a pose of helpless femininity highlights Wuornos' predatory nature and thus assists in monsterizing her. Wuornos is depicted actively plying her sexual services on the highway, sticking her thumb out to attempt to get (male) drivers to transport her and/or solicit her services. She is then shown violently killing two men by shooting them multiple times with her pistol. Troy Buress' ideal victim portrayal on *Deadly Women* assists with such monsterization, since he is portrayed as a Good Samaritan who "…just stopped to give Aileen a lift" (narrator). Even the unnamed victim who attempts to force Wuornos to drink from his flask is exonerated from wrongdoing (see Pearson, 2007, p. 262-263), since this murder scene occurs in the context of the discussion of Wuornos' "tremendous rage" (Taylor) and enjoyment of killing (DeLong). Hence, Wuornos' disguise of Damsel in Distress femininity monsterizes her. Aileen Wuornos' 'disguise' or pose also allows her to enact a particular 'fantasized' identity in order to get the attention of (male) drivers on the highway. This 'fantasy' role she adopted in this context twisted such femininity into something violent and murderous, since she used it to trap men into thinking she was more helpless or powerless than she actually was. Her use of this 'ploy' likely bolstered what confidence and power she had, in carrying out her deadly desires. Wuornos' taking on of such a powerful role—albeit through the ploy of hyperfemininity—likely also aided in her monsterization.

Gender is primarily performed in Wuornos' representation on *Deadly Women* through "monsterization" (Morrissey, 2003). This technique also evokes aspects of

othering, distancing, and dehumanizing the female killer (see Morrissey, 2003, p. 25) from society and its 'normal' members. Yet, Wuornos' portrayal in this episode not only monsterizes her, but also depicts her animalism (Morrissey, 2003, p. 39). On this show, she is turned into a predator, an animal hunting prey that do not stand a chance of surviving once they are in her sights. The narrator's introduction and conclusion of the episode both reinforce this view of female predatory killers. Furthermore, Wuornos is depicted grimacing angrily like a dog while executing one of her victims who had forcefully attempted to make her drink from his flask. As I argued above, this scene negates the possibility of this crime being committed out of self-defence, due to the depiction of Wuornos grasping her pistol before this man does anything to provoke such preparation. Once this man is lying shot and hurt on the ground outside his vehicle in the deserted rest-stop area, Wuornos shoots him again to ensure he is dead. In this shot, Wuornos' face is illuminated by the gunshot, and she is grimacing and baring her teeth like an animal about to attack its prey. This scene occurs in the discussion of Wuornos' possible motives on *Deadly Women*, specifically during Detective Taylor's and DeLong's testimony regarding Wuornos' tremendous rage and enjoyment of killing, respectively. This therefore reinforces Wuornos' monsterization. In this last shot, Wuornos' eyes are glinting and focussed on her victim while she finishes him off. The glint in her eyes could be interpreted as perhaps a sense of enjoyment on Wuornos' face, which again plays into her monsterization. Perhaps Wuornos receives some sort of cathartic release from a kill? In this sense, could killing perhaps be viewed as retribution for all the abuse and neglect Wuornos has suffered in her life? If so, would this play into her "monsterization" or into her depiction as a vengeful victim getting back at her (male) oppressors for her

victimization? Does this revenge and overkill play into the fear of feminism and virulent or strident feminists as violently vengeful man haters? Is this why Wuornos is so terrifying yet compelling to scholars, media producers, and the general public? Here, Wuornos represents men's (and hence society's) fears over brash and vociferous man hating feminists exacting revenge on our oppressors for all their abuse. Thus Wuornos must be punished and executed, to kill the threat to society and (men's) norms. However, I stray away from such non-feminist, non-agentic, dehumanizing and sensationalistic discourse, in favour of a more sympathetic and agentic stance on female killers like Aileen Wuornos.

Such references to Wuornos' animalism relate to notions of femininity as closer to nature than masculinity (see, for instance, Bell, 2009, p. 148-151). Val Plumwood (1991) elaborates on feminist philosophy's critiques of environmental philosophy, especially pertaining to the latter's use of rationalist philosophical frameworks that are biased towards gender and nature (p. 300-301). Such rationalist accounts are vital in creating dualisms—such as reason versus emotion, in which the former is typically deemed male and the latter is typically deemed female—and thus perpetuating a hierarchy of superiority/inferiority among the pairs in such dichotomies. Such dualisms also work within the realm of nature and environmental philosophy, in which nature has also been denied possession of reason thus construed as masculine and oppositional to the inferior 'feminine' emotions, the physical, the bodily and the animal (Plumwood, 1991, p. 302). Such a construction of reason demarcates the 'truly' human and creates the allegedly distinct separation between all humans and the nonhuman world, and also within the human self (Plumwood, 1991, p. 302). Thus, such a reason/emotion dichotomy creates

foreclosures in what is considered (un)livable and (un)speakable in society and within any discourse, particularly what constitutes approved feminine gender expressions in cases of female killers and also the downplaying of Wuornos' tale of self-defence as opposed to her monsterization (Butler, 1997, cited in Morrissey, 2003, p. 55). Such foreclosure also relates to the privileging of Wuornos' monsterization over her own victimhood in her representation on *Deadly Women*. The respective titles of this series and this episode both privilege the conventional view of female killers as predators and monsters. To cohere and thus make sense, Wuornos' particular gender enactment on this series must reinforce her as both a female killer and a predator. Plumwood (1991) also emphasizes Western thought's strong adherence to the human/nature dualism and the set of interconnected binaries of mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, and masculine/feminine (p. 304). The human/nature dualism strictly defines what humans should strive not to be: animal, sexual, emotional, the senses, and agency (p. 305). As such, in this dualism, "[h]umanity is defined oppositionally to both nature and the feminine" (Plumwood, 1991, p. 305). Such dualistic thinking can be viewed in traditional understandings of female killers as monsters, mythic creatures, and/or non-human.[8]

Such patriarchal dualisms about femininity and nature also relate to how female criminals were treated in early criminological and sociological theory and research. Such theories typically viewed (criminal) women as 'other' than, and inferior to, men.[9] Women and their criminality were both highly sexualized in such theories (Comack, 2006, p. 24). These early theories essentialized women's biology in explanations of female criminality (see also Klein, 1973; Lloyd, 1995, p. xvi-xx). Wuornos'

[8] See, for instance, Comack, 2006; Jewkes, 2011; Klein, 1973; Lloyd, 1995; and Morrissey, 2003.
[9] For a brief record of such male-centred, misogynistic traditional criminological and sociological studies, see, for instance, Comack, 2006, p. 22-27.

monsterization on *Deadly Women* reflects such 'othering' as in the early androcentric/misogynistic thinking above.

Thus, Aileen Wuornos' depiction on *Deadly Women* as an enactment of monstrous predatory femininity is a replication of conventional understandings of female killers. Although her representation predominantly focuses upon Wuornos' "monsterization" (Morrissey, 2003), Wuornos' own victimhood and troubled life story is also discussed, yet never in such a manner that would condone her serial murders. Wuornos is depicted as both human and animal/monster, and as deserving of sympathy for her own victimhood, but also deserving of punishment. Wuornos must be executed for her serial killings and also for her deadly transgressions of what proper femininity stands for or represents in our society. Ultimately, Wuornos must be represented as "the monster" for the show to adequately police the boundaries of gender and sexuality. Such "monstrosity" is not only vicariously thrilling and entertaining for the audience, but also provides us with a protective, reassuring narrative closure when we learn of Wuornos' execution. What I find interesting about Wuornos' case is that she represents the duality of serial killer and victim, of monster and human very powerfully. Although the cases represented on *Deadly Women* discuss the life stories of the murderesses in question—many of which include deprivation, abuse, community expulsion, and so on—Wuornos best represents this duality between monsterization and victimhood. It is this duality within Wuornos (as well as her outspoken, raucous behaviour during her trials) that makes her so intriguing for audiences, scholars and media producers. Wuornos' monstrosity is also easy to depict in visual media forms; it is simple to show that a lesbian serial-killing prostitute is a monster, which I have shown above. However, how

can someone be called a "monster" if there can be some sense of sympathy for this person? When I think of "monster", that label should be applied to someone who is not deserving of any sympathy whatsoever, since their actions or murders are so brutal as to be incomprehensible in terms of humanity. Wuornos' actions cannot be labelled as "monstrous" since, in my view, she did not really stand a chance to live a 'normal' life given her atrocious upbringing. Thus, my ultimate feeling is one of sympathy for Wuornos' troubled life story, and of confusion about why she of all female killers is "the monster." From my perspective, any sympathetic portrayal lessens or negates the efficacy or effectiveness of the female killers' monsterization. Hence, the combination of victimhood and monsterization in Wuornos' representation on *Deadly Women* serves to complicate her portrayal as someone who is "inhuman." As an analyst, I lean towards the sympathetic portrayal of Wuornos' own victimhood, and away from the monsterization of this female killer.

Karla Homolka's absence thus far in the eight seasons (including the mini-series) of *Deadly Women* is intriguing, especially since Canadian cases of female killers have been depicted before on this series. I do not know why Homolka has not been portrayed on *Deadly Women*; nevertheless her absence is interesting. I think Homolka fits "the monster" label much more than Wuornos, given that Homolka offered her fifteen-year-old sister's body to her serial-rapist husband Paul Bernardo. The two plied young Tammy with alcoholic drinks laced with a sedative, and then raped her once she fell unconscious. Tammy became sick while she was sedated and died (Morrissey, 2003, p. 140). Furthermore, the sheer brutality of the torture, rape and murder of their other victims, Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French, shows how violent and inexcusable Homolka and

Bernardo's crimes are (see Morrissey, 2003, p. 140-141). Homolka negotiated a plea agreement with the police in exchange for her testimony against the abusive Bernardo. She was sentenced to two concurrent maximum sentences of twelve years for the manslaughter of Mahaffy and French. Paul Bernardo was convicted and sentenced to life with no parole for twenty-five years (Morrissey, 2003, p. 141). Home-made videotapes later surfaced showing Karla Homolka's willing participation in, and enthusiastic enjoyment of, the assaults of their victims (Morrissey, 2003, p. 144-145). Although Homolka did violently defy the cultural notions of 'proper' femininity in her sexually sadistic crimes, her conventionally attractive appearance and heterosexuality distinguish her from the unkempt lesbian serial-killing prostitute Aileen Wuornos. This does not account for Homolka's absence on *Deadly Women*, but rather potentially for why Homolka is not "monsterized" generally in media representations of her murders to the extent that Wuornos is.[10] Karla Homolka represents an instance of a female killer whose criminal acts cannot be portrayed in any sort of a sympathetic manner, and yet, it is Aileen Wuornos who is frequently "monsterized" in mainstream conventional media accounts of her crimes. This relates to the sympathy and confusion I feel when viewing conventional media representations of female killers, in this case *Deadly Women*, which portray the specific killer as both inhuman and as a human victim to feel sorry for.

[10] For more on Karla Homolka, her crimes, and how they are represented in the media, see, for instance, Boyle, 2005, p. 101-103, 199; Faith & Jiwani, 2002, p. 83-107; and Morrissey, 2003, p. 134-164.

Chapter 5: Jill Coit, *Deadly Women*, and Female Masculinity

Introduction

Jill Coit's representation on *Deadly Women* in the episode "Fortune Hunters" (Season 4 (2010), episode 3) provides an alternative way of understanding and discussing female killers. Jill Coit was found guilty of the first-degree murder of her husband Gerry Boggs, and is currently serving life without parole for that crime. The fortune-hunting bigamist and former model is also the prime suspect in the unsolved murder of her third husband, William Coit. Although Jill Coit is depicted killing William Coit in a feminine-looking bright red dress, Coit (and her male accomplice Michael Backus) commits the Boggs murder dressed in a male trucker disguise. Coit kills Boggs while dressed in an oversized baseball cap, a men's blue jacket and plaid shirt, and a clearly fake handlebar moustache. Since Coit is presented as the dominant one in her partnership with Michael Backus, she presumably also suggested their particular disguises. Yet, there is no detailed discussion on *Deadly Women* about the specific costumes she dons to commit these murders. In this chapter, I argue that in committing the Boggs murder disguised as a male trucker, Jill Coit performs her own version of (deadly) female masculinity (c.f. Halberstam, 1998). I also argue that Jill Coit's enactment of dangerous seductive femininity in her case segment provides another way of examining and discussing female murderers.

Deadly Women and Representations of Jill Coit

I will primarily focus on Coit's representation of (deadly) female masculinity since it provides the clearest example of an enactment of female masculinity (c.f. Halberstam, 1998) on *Deadly Women*. Furthermore, there is no detailed discussion in the

episode about Coit's male disguise and/or why she is depicted wearing it in the commission of Boggs' murder. There is also no discussion regarding why Jill Coit is depicted wearing the masculine disguise to commit Boggs' murder, yet she is shown wearing a feminine red dress in the commission of her third husband William Coit's murder. On *Deadly Women*, Coit is only convicted of Gerry Boggs' murder. William Coit's murder remains unsolved, though Coit is the prime suspect in the case. This emphasizes the primacy and significance of Boggs' murder and of Coit's enactment of (deadly) female masculinity on *Deadly Women*. Yet, the depiction of William Coit's murder is important, since it demonstrates Coit's enactment of dangerous seductive femininity. This particular enactment of femininity is discussed in more detail throughout Coit's depiction on *Deadly Women* than is her enactment of (deadly) female masculinity, which is only briefly represented in the specific context of Gerry Boggs' murder.

Such exclusion or foreclosure of further discussion on *Deadly Women* is important in the context of Coit's gender enactment in this episode, and the possibilities of subversion within performativity. Any social construct of subjectivity is distinct from that which it is not, and is thus (re)produced through foreclosures or exclusions (Morrissey, 2003, p. 55). Such foreclosures continually (re)create or (re)produce the subject, therefore subjectivity construction is always in a process of 'becoming.' This also applies to abject subjectivities, or those without subjecthood in a specific discourse (Morrissey, 2003, p. 55). The lack of further detailed discussion on *Deadly Women* regarding Coit's male costume in one murder and her feminine dress for another murder renders such a subjectivity or gender enactment abject or 'other' within the bounds of the normative, heterosexual dominant discourse of this series. By not analyzing why Coit

does what she does, the 'experts' on the episode prematurely foreclose the possibilities for displacing and proliferating alternative 'deviant' (even subversive) gender identities of female killers (Butler, 1990, p. 46). Sexed/gendered identities are taken on or enacted through the violent rejection and exclusion or foreclosure of identities that are considered not to matter within a heterosexual matrix that has a vested interest in preserving its own coherence and stability to the detriment of 'other' identities (Salih, 2002, p. 76; Butler, 1993, p. xxx). Although Coit is represented on the show as heterosexual, her performativity of (deadly) female masculinity nevertheless subverts and parodies the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990, p. 208, note 6; Salih, 2002, p. 49). In this sense, Coit's male disguise and her dominance over her male accomplice in Boggs' murder displaces and renders unintelligible the dominant discourse regarding 'appropriate' femininity, and thus may be why Coit's disguise and why it is worn by her in this specific context is not discussed in more detail on *Deadly Women*. Foreclosure operates to determine the boundaries of (un)speakability and (un)livability within any discourse (Morrissey, 2003, p. 55). Power is productive, yet also works through the foreclosure of the (discursive) domain of (un)intelligibility and (un)livability regarding sex, gender and so forth (Butler, 1993, p. xxx). Yet, there are always possibilities for subversion or resistance by those 'abjectified' or 'othered' through speech, who may continually redraw the distinctions between the speakable and the unspeakable and the subjectified and the abjectified (Butler, 1997, p. 139, cited in Morrissey, 2003, p. 55). Hence, Jill Coit's enactment of (deadly) female masculinity on *Deadly Women* is subversive.

Coit's representation emphasizes the instability and constructed nature of gender, in depicting her ensnaring men in her violent scheme of beauty, charm, manipulation,

deceit and homicide. Coit thus viciously deviates from the conventional cultural codes and norms of how 'proper' women are expected to behave in society. Her enactment of (deadly) female masculinity on *Deadly Women*—an otherwise feminine woman commits a cruel murder while disguised in baggy men's clothing and a fake moustache, and is depicted as being dominant over her male accomplice in this crime—highlights the fictive and performative nature of gender. Highlighting the performativity of Coit's representation, the narrator says of her, "Jill Coit is an ex-model…a woman of many faces…and *many* dangers, *if* you're a man" (her emphasis). Coit's "many faces" dangerously and subversively 'put on' or enacted during her depiction highlights her subversive and parodic gender performativity on *Deadly Women*. Her enactment of (deadly) female masculinity in this episode represents a specific instance of subversive gender parody.

Since there is no stable or 'true' gender for Butler, it is thus possible to enact gender in ways that displace and parody the heterosexual matrix (see Butler, 1990, p. 186). All gender is a form of parody, yet some gender performances are more parodic than others. Jill Coit's parodic performance of (deadly) female masculinity on *Deadly Women* reveals the imitative nature of all gender identities (see Butler, 1990, p. 187-188). Coit's parodic performance on this series is an imitation of the notion of an original, primary masculinity as active, aggressive, dominant, and violent. Coit's imitation of masculinity is inadequate as evidenced by the clearly fake moustache she wears during the commission of Boggs' murder. Coit's disguise in this particular murder is only briefly acknowledged in the introduction to her case portrayal. The clearly artificial appearance of Coit's male disguise—specifically the almost laughable handlebar moustache—

highlights the imitativeness of gender and the 'parodic' nature of Coit's enactment of her alternative 'deviant' gender identity on *Deadly Women*. Coit's enactment of dangerous seductive femininity in her segment on the show can also be viewed as displacing the heterosexual matrix of power and identity, since it demonstrates that women are not solely passive, gentle, compassionate, nurturing subjects, but can be dominant, aggressive, active and violent as well.

Jill Coit's enactment of (deadly) female masculinity on *Deadly Women* is an exemplar of a subversive gender performance. Our choices of gender expression and of subversion are limited within the heterosexual matrix; thus, we must modify the tools we already have in ways that reveal the 'unnatural' and performative nature of gender (see Salih, 2002, p. 50-51, 66; Butler, 1990, p. 199). Coit's representation appears to destabilize the hegemonic, heterosexual model of culturally intelligible and legitimate sex and gender, and is thus subversive in this regard. Furthermore, Coit's parodic performance of (deadly) female masculinity occurs within the overall normative, heterosexual discursive lens of this television series and its 'experts' who do not analyze in detail Coit's disguises for murder. Since Coit's enactment of (deadly) female masculinity displaces the dominant discourse regarding 'proper' womanhood, it can thus be argued to be subversive. Therefore, Jill Coit's depiction on this show can be viewed as an instance of subversive gender parody (see Butler, 1990, p. 189).

It is also intriguing that Coit's masculine disguise is only briefly discussed in the introduction to her case portrayal on *Deadly Women*, ending with the depiction of Coit and Boggs' ill-fated meeting. Coit's case segment opens with a depiction of Steamboat Springs, Colorado, as a quaint, bucolic tightly knit town. There are establishing shots of

snow-capped mountains, a placid lake or river, and of vehicles casually driving by picturesque buildings and houses. This picture of the town is then juxtaposed with the image of Coit's (deadly) female masculinity. Although the audience could view such an obvious disguise as a joke or a Halloween costume, the narrator and Chief of Police Hays both counter this possible reading by presenting the murderous intent behind Coit's costume. Yet, without further thorough discussion of such a representation and male outfit, the narrative then quickly shifts to a depiction of Coit and Boggs' doomed meeting. The depiction of this meeting emphasizes Jill Coit's enactment of dangerous seductive femininity in her representation on this television show. These juxtapositions and quick shifts of focus—from quaint town, to Coit's masculine disguise for murder, to Coit's beauty and appeal to men—serve as foreclosures regarding what is deemed (un)speakable and (un)acceptable within the bounds of the normative, heterosexual view of the *Deadly Women* television series (Butler, 1997, cited in Morrissey, 2003, p. 55).

These juxtapositions also serve to highlight the threat(s) that Jill Coit's enactment of (deadly) female masculinity poses. The first juxtaposition emphasizes the threat that such a gender enactment or representation poses to the 'normal' town, the home, the private sphere, as well as to everyday 'normal' citizens (male, white, and so forth). Such a threat most likely extends past the specific town of Steamboat Springs, to apply more generally to similar quaint tightly knit towns and similar small town citizens in Western societies. Pearson (2007) examines the spatial norm of domesticity supporting criminology and domestic violence feminism in the cases of female killers, specifically Aileen Wuornos (p. 258). Here, female violence is predominantly encoded spatially within the domestic sphere, and often perpetrated against an abusive, typically male,

intimate partner (see, for instance, Pearson, 2007, p. 259). Although domestic violence (against women) is not represented at any point in her portrayal, Coit can be viewed as "preying upon…familial relations" (Pearson, 2007, p. 263) through her brutal murders of her husbands and/or such potential fathers. Coit is represented especially "biting the hand that breeds" (Pearson, 2007, p. 263) in the depiction of Gerry Boggs' murder. Boggs is represented on *Deadly Women* as being clearly ecstatic and genuinely anticipating becoming a father. We see Coit and Boggs getting married in a shotgun wedding, under false pretences (narrator). The black and white shot of their wedding day clearly highlights the disjuncture between Boggs' genuine delight and Coit's fake and forced attempt to pose as a happy new wife. In this shot, Boggs' wide open-mouthed grin shows him joyfully celebrating this momentous occasion. Coit, however, is posing like a happy newlywed, but her smile and partially thrown back head appear stiff and forced. Boggs is also represented as "enormously looking forward to being a father" as demonstrated by Boggs' purchase of baby books[11] and the depiction of Boggs assembling a crib in the eating area of his home. Coit is depicted entering this scene carrying a basket full of baby items. Boggs quickly stands up to relieve 'pregnant' Coit of this heavy-looking load. Coit then removes a teddy bear from the basket and hands it to Boggs. Boggs holds the bear in his hands and looks at it with a proud and happy smile on his face. Coit removes a card from the basket, which reads "To Daddy, From Lara xxx." Boggs reacts in genuine joy at the 'daddy' aspect of the card. Coit hands the card to Boggs, looks at him with her head cocked to the right and a devious, self-satisfied expression on her face. This illustrates Coit's enactment on *Deadly Women* of manipulative, deceitful, dangerous femininity (see Lloyd, 1995, p. 48), which counters the current hegemonic perspective of femininity as

[11] As author Steven Singular states during Jill Coit's case representation.

passive, nurturing and so forth. Hence, Coit's enactment as above fits into a 'subordinate' femininity definition (Connell, 1995, p. 78), which I discuss further below. Returning to this scene, Boggs is then depicted kissing Coit's cheek and kneeling to joyfully embrace her pregnant stomach. Coit is then shown exasperatedly rolling her eyes at Boggs' display of affection, and then slapping the top of Boggs' head and telling him to stop what he is doing. Boggs stands and carefully broaches the subject of Coit going to the doctor since she is not showing any signs of pregnancy. Coit then defensively shouts "there's nothing wrong with me," thrusts the teddy bear at Boggs' chest, and then exits the room in a huff. Boggs looks resignedly down at the teddy bear in his hands. Coit is later represented in the show killing Boggs in his Steamboat Springs home and also killing William Coit in his Houston home. Therefore, the domestic settings of Jill Coit's murders, as represented in this episode, pose a deadly threat to familial relations and to everyday 'normal' towns and citizens in Western societies.

The narrative shift to Coit's male disguise for Boggs' murder serves to highlight the threat Coit's enactment of (deadly) female masculinity poses to mainstream heteropatriarchy or the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990, p. 208, note 6). The clearly artificial appearance of Coit's male outfit, particularly the almost ridiculous moustache, highlights the comedic or 'parodic' nature of her enactment of (deadly) female masculinity on this television series. This is also an instance of subversive gender parody, since it destabilizes the existing heterosexual power structures operating within the overall normative, heterosexual discursive lens of *Deadly Women* (see Butler, 1990, p. 189). Since Coit's enactment displaces the dominant discourse regarding culturally approved femininity, it is arguably subversive. Heteropatriarchy refers to "a society in

which the heterosexual, male/masculine is assumed to be the norm, and anyone or anything that differs from this is defined as 'other' and is subject to censure or discrimination" (Jewkes, 2011, p. 282). Female violence threatens (hetero)patriarchal society since it challenges the 'naturalness' of the gender dualism on which that society depends (Boyle, 2005, p. 100).

Finally, Coit's male disguise for murder is juxtaposed with her beauty and appeal to men, as seen in the depiction of Coit and Boggs' ill-fated meeting. Hence, this juxtaposition highlights that Coit's enactment of (deadly) female masculinity poses a threat to men, since this depiction emphasizes how Coit's beauty and overt flirtatious nature clearly delights and entices Boggs into Coit's deadly web[12] or scheme. This evokes Coit's enactment of (deadly) female masculinity since Coit is later depicted killing Boggs while she is disguised in large men's clothing and a fake moustache. Women are defined in reference to men, who represent the 'norm' in society and define the standards whereby other beings are measured, judged and so forth. The androcentric (and heterosexist) nature of society plays a crucial role in how all women are viewed and treated as 'other' than, and inferior to, men and the cultural 'norm' (see Lloyd, 1995, p. xvii). Jill Coit is thus represented on *Deadly Women* as posing a lethal threat to men, in not only murdering men, but also in seducing men quite easily into her scheming and deadly web. The expert testimony in this episode represents such a normative, heterosexual view of manipulative, deceitful, greedy female killers such as Jill Coit. Former FBI profiler DeLong presents one such instance of this particular discursive lens

[12] Jill Coit fits into the category of Black Widow since she killed her husbands for financial gain (see, for instance, Birch, 1994b, p. 51-52; Holmlund, 1994; and Schmid, 2005, p. 79). However, this category animalizes and dehumanizes the female killer and is more of a sensationalistic term, so I have refrained from employing it here.

of female murderers. As DeLong says: “It would take a very *strong* man and a man experienced, in life experienced with women to be able to *spot* what Jill was *really* all about. Most men couldn’t” (her emphasis). This positions Coit as a dangerous manipulator of men, whose skill would entice most men into her murderous trap.

Butler’s (1990) destabilization of the distinction between sex and gender (see, for instance, p. 8-10) thus highlights that men can be feminine and women can be masculine. This relates to Halberstam’s (1998) notion of female masculinity. Halberstam (1998) argues that masculinity is not solely a male trait, since women can also be masculine. Female masculinity is not merely an “imitation of maleness,” but rather it offers a glimpse of “…how masculinity is constructed as masculinity” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 1). Thus, female masculinities are “…framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear [as] the real thing. But what we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 1-2). Hence, female masculinity must be analyzed and permitted to generate positive social change for everyone, not solely those persons whose bodies and subjectivities digress from conventional gender codes. The lack of in-depth discussion of Jill Coit’s masculine disguise by the experts on the episode represents an unfortunate omission in the opportunity to provide a critical gender studies analysis of such a depiction on this series.

The representations of gender and femininity on *Deadly Women* can be understood as enactments of female masculinity. Jill Coit’s representation provides the clearest example of female masculinity since she is depicted wearing a disguise that makes her look like a moustached trucker during the commission of the murder of her ex-

husband Gerry Boggs. Coit is primarily represented as a seductively feminine former model, and only performs a version of female masculinity—her male disguise and her dominance over her male accomplice—in committing Boggs' murder. However, Coit's depiction on *Deadly Women*—her active flirtation and seduction of men, her evasion of punishment for a lot of fraudulent and criminal acts, her insatiable greed, her murders—can be viewed as a deviation from the conventional social norm of passive, nurturing, gentle and compassionate womanhood.

This highlights the issue regarding Halberstam's (1998) specific focus on *queer* female masculinity (p. 28). This is of concern for my thesis since Jill Coit is represented on this series as a *heterosexual* woman who only enacts a form of female masculinity in the murder of Gerry Boggs. Halberstam (1998) concentrates on queer female masculinity, since female masculinity appears to be most threatening when it is coupled with lesbian sexuality (p. 28). As Halberstam (1998) states: "I have no doubt that heterosexual female masculinity menaces gender conformity in its own way, but all too often it represents an acceptable degree of female masculinity as compared to the excessive masculinity of the dyke" (p. 28). Jill Coit's heterosexual female masculinity is perhaps not further discussed on *Deadly Women*, since it is not (or is not deemed to be) *as* excessive or *as* threatening to gender conformity or the heterosexual matrix as queer female masculinity is. Perhaps since Coit is still a heterosexual, feminine woman underneath this (inadequate and even comedic) masculine disguise, it is not deemed necessary to analyze (particularly in a serious academic manner) such a depiction of female masculinity. However, such a gender enactment is still seen as subversive gender parody, as argued above.

However, Jill Coit's portrayal can be viewed as a representation of "the masculine heterosexual woman" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 57-59). Halberstam (1998) acknowledges that it is out of her book's scope to discuss the history of the masculine heterosexual woman (p. 57). Yet, she does state that "the masculine heterosexual woman need not be viewed as a lesbian in denial; she may merely be a woman who rejects the strictures of femininity" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 59). Jill Coit, as represented on *Deadly Women*, violently rejects and contravenes the confines of the traditional norms and codes of nurturing and passive womanhood. Representations of Coit's active and overt seduction of men, her avoiding punishment for fraudulent and criminal acts, her greed, and her murders, all depict Jill Coit violating the conventional cultural notions of what constitutes 'properly' feminine behaviour.

In the following section, I analyze Jill Coit's portrayal through Connell's (1995, 2002) notion and framework of multiple masculinities and femininities, as well as through Lloyd's (1995) doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis.

Other Theories in Combinatory Framework

Jill Coit, in her case portrayal, enacts a version of 'subordinate' femininity, in Connell's (1995) sense of this term. Subordinate masculinity may refer to those masculinities that are not culturally dominant in society, in the specific time period in question (Connell, 1995, p. 78). 'Subordination' in this sense applies to the violent women represented on *Deadly Women*, since such women do not fit into the current hegemonic view of femininity. Such a perspective is based on women being deemed passive, nurturing, timid, demure, compassionate, gentle, and other traits frequently or traditionally held of women. Of course, subordinate in Connell's sense of the word means

that this gender identity is exceptional, or is outside or apart from the usual expression of that identity. Ironically, this means that a woman who is subordinate in this sense of the word can also be in-subordinate, or non-submissive, in relation to a man. It is important in this thesis to keep the two senses of this word clear and separate, hence my use of inverted commas when necessary. Thus, Coit's depiction on *Deadly Women* adopts a 'subordinate' femininity perspective, in arguing that some women (specifically Coit) can be violent and deadly just like men and thus counters the current hegemonic perspective of socially acceptable womanhood as above. On *Deadly Women*, Coit is portrayed as a beautiful, seductive ex-model who uses her dangerous femininity and sexuality to entangle men in her deadly trap and then murder them for their money. Coit is also represented as the dominant one in her partnership with Michael Backus in the murder of Gerry Boggs. This also emphasizes Jill Coit's enactment of 'subordinate' femininity in her portrayal on *Deadly Women*, in countering the prevailing hegemonic perspective of femininity as above. In this context, Coit displays the 'unladylike' qualities or traits of violence, dominance and aggressiveness, in addition to the negative connotations of authority and leadership. Furthermore, Jill Coit is also depicted as being the prime suspect in the unsolved murder of her third husband William Coit. She is shown killing William while she is dressed in a vivid red dress. William's murder is depicted as being quite similar to Boggs' murder, as Detective Devalle states. Jill Coit's possible involvement in the deaths of her many husbands "almost *all over* the United States" (author Singular, his emphasis) also supports her enactment of 'subordinate' femininity on this series. These two statements imply that Coit is a potential serial killer[13] and thus represent the normative, heterosexual view of female killers as insatiable, greedy,

[13] The narrator explicitly states that Jill Coit is a serial killer in the episode's introduction.

manipulative, deceitful, and able to remain undetected by the criminal justice system for even years while they are in plain sight.

Given this, Lloyd's (1995) doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis could be viewed as playing a role in Jill Coit's representation on *Deadly Women*. However, Jill Coit's sentence as well as her portrayal on this series can be viewed as appropriate (neither harsh nor lenient) given the circumstances represented. This counters Lloyd's (1995) hypothesis. Lloyd (1995) argues that female murderers are doubly deviant and thus doubly damned, since they have not only committed a crime but have also contravened traditional cultural norms of approved femininity. In the criminal justice system, women who do not conform to conventional gender stereotypes are at high risk of harsher treatment and sentences, as well as to being judged lacking as women according to hegemonic views of what it is to be 'properly' feminine. Jill Coit receives an appropriate life sentence without parole for the first-degree murder of Gerry Boggs, and she is also the prime suspect in the unsolved murder of her third husband William Coit (narrator). Coit is also not judged lacking as a woman, since she is portrayed as a feminine woman who murders one husband while disguised as a man and kills one more while wearing a red dress. Hence, Jill Coit is represented on *Deadly Women* as doubly deviant, yet not doubly damned.

Lloyd (1995) outlines eight male-centred, misogynistic stereotypes of violent women (p. 47-52). Jill Coit's representation on *Deadly Women* corresponds with the tropes of "the sexual temptress" and "woman the deceiver" (p. 48), which are somewhat related. As Lloyd (1995) states, the sexual temptress "…is the quintessentially evil sexual woman. Manipulative and deceitful, she uses her sexual wiles to entrap and ensnare men

who are powerless to resist her. A she-devil who both fascinates and repels" (p. 48). Regarding the latter stereotype, all women are inherently deceitful, and violent women use this intrinsic ability in the commission of their crimes (see Lloyd, 1995, p. 48). This trope also highlights the biological essentialism and sexualization of women and their criminality that was generally expounded within traditional mainstream criminological explanations of such crime (see, for instance, Comack, 2006, p. 24-27; Klein, 1973; Lloyd, 1995, p. xvi-xx).

Jill Coit is undoubtedly portrayed on this episode as a sexual temptress who beguiles men in the commission of her crimes. Throughout the segment devoted to her case, Coit is (re)presented as a former model who brazenly uses her sexuality to trick men into marrying her or even assisting her in committing a cruel homicide. Coit is also called a "serial wife," "fortune-hunting bigamist" and "a serial killer" (narrator). Her cunning nature is evident even when Coit commits the Boggs murder while disguised as a man (and thus Coit enacts a version of female masculinity). Coit convinced her accomplice Backus into assisting her in this murder, as Detective Devalle states. Devalle thus represents the normalizing, heterosexual view of female murderers as inherently deceptive and devious temptresses (Lloyd, 1995, p. 48). Although Devalle does not elaborate on the specific way Coit managed to convince Backus (sexually, verbal coercion, and so forth), it is more important here that Jill Coit is depicted as convincing Michael Backus to act as an accomplice to a violent murder.

Thus, Jill Coit's representation on *Deadly Women* provides an alternative way of understanding and discussing female murderers. Coit was found guilty of the first-degree murder of her husband Gerry Boggs, and is currently serving life without parole for that

crime. She is also the prime suspect in the unsolved murder of her third husband, William Coit. There is an intriguing lack of detailed discussion regarding Coit's moustached trucker disguise for Boggs' murder on *Deadly Women*. It may not be discussed further simply due to time constraints or other such unintentional restrictions of debate. Perhaps the lack of discussion serves to regulate the bounds of gender, sexuality and sexual orientation. This may be why Coit's costume is shown in such a ridiculous, cheesy and clearly fake manner. It is easy to see that Coit is a woman underneath the almost laughable moustache. The show's producers cannot fully invest in a serious and scholarly discussion or depiction of Coit's (deadly) female masculinity; perhaps they do not want the audience to be attracted or convinced by Coit's female masculinity. The comedic portrayal of Coit's female masculinity seems to poke fun at such alternative gender identities, as not a 'real' option for people to perform. While I cannot say for certain why, the lack of further discussion seems to reinforce the normalizing, heterosexist, and gender conservative nature of the *Deadly Women* television series.

Jill Coit uses the moustache and men's clothing to bring out her masculine side to assist her in killing Boggs. In contrast, she wears a red dress, and uses her dangerous seductive femininity, to kill her third husband. In her pursuit of their money, Coit appears to be conflicted about how to dress to kill. Her masculine disguise was clearly inadequate in concealing her (feminine) identity from potential witnesses (see also, for instance, Weller, 1993). The murder in which she wore a feminine costume is still unsolved; so why did she not wear another such successful outfit to kill Gerry Boggs? Thus, in defeating this obvious reason to wear a costume, other reasons must be considered. Perhaps she felt she needed to enact a particular (murderous, masculine) identity to fit the

‘mood’ or scene of the Boggs murder? People often don particular costumes to perform ‘fantasized’ identities to fit certain situations, such as at Halloween or at job interviews. Such a fantasized masculine identity and disguise may have also bolstered Coit’s confidence and power in carrying out her violent desires, since she had gotten away with murder before. By wearing a male costume, Jill Coit took on the role of the dominant gender position in society. Fortunately, such a thrill of enacting a different and powerful role in killing Boggs did not help her evade punishment for this crime.

Chapter 6: Ashley Humphrey, *Deadly Women*, and Victimized Femininity

Introduction

Ashley Humphrey's representation on *Deadly Women* provides another way of understanding and discussing female killers. Under the control of her violent rapist husband, Tracey Humphrey, Ashley murders Tracey's rape victim, Sandee Rozzo, to prevent her from testifying against Tracey. From the safety of his couch, we see Tracey Humphrey ordering Ashley, through a series of cell phone calls, to smear black face paint on her hands and face, and then instruct her on how to kill Sandee. Tracey is depicted calmly and casually saying to Ashley, "I want it everywhere. I want you to look like a black man." In this chapter, I argue that Ashley Humphrey, as represented on *Deadly Women*, enacts a form of dangerous violent racialized hegemonic masculinity (c.f. Connell, 1995, 2002) in the commission of Sandee Rozzo's murder. However, Ashley Humphrey is also depicted as being fully under Tracey's control to commit this murder. On *Deadly Women*, Ashley Humphrey is also referred to as a "deadly puppet" and a "puppet assassin" (narrator). Although Ashley is not portrayed as a victim of domestic violence on *Deadly Women*, she still fits within the "woman as victim" stereotype (Lloyd, 1995, p. 49), or victimized femininity. This episode is entitled "Dangerous Liaisons" (Season 4 (2010), episode 4) and concentrates on the possible dangers of romantic love. Thus, in this chapter, I also argue that Ashley Humphrey is represented as fitting the "woman as victim" stereotype. Ashley is depicted as a victim of her need to be loved by a man, no matter the lethal consequences.

Deadly Women and Representations of Ashley Humphrey

Ashley Humphrey's depiction on *Deadly Women* reproduces the notion of what a particular form of femininity constitutes, namely naïve, vulnerable, love struck, victimized femininity (Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2004, p. 348; Butler, 1990). Ashley is represented as a woman who commits murder under the command of her violent rapist husband Tracey Humphrey, and who would likely not have killed anyone in her life had it not been for Tracey's controlling influence. Tracey is depicted ordering Ashley to commit Rozzo's murder while disguised as a black man—as shown through the black face paint Ashley is ordered to wear by Tracey in this context—which thus evokes Ashley's enactment of dangerous violent racialized hegemonic masculinity on this series. Hence, Ashley Humphrey's enactments of victimized femininity and of dangerous violent racialized hegemonic masculinity on this episode highlight that gender identity is always in a process of becoming and is never fixed nor stable (see Butler, 1990, p. 34).

However, Ashley Humphrey's representation on *Deadly Women* is not an instance of subversive gender parody (see Butler, 1990, p. 189). Ashley's enactment of weak, naive, lovesick, victimized femininity is neither subversive nor parodic. Rather, it upholds or reinforces the current hegemonic view of 'appropriate' femininity, which is based on women being passive, nurturing, submissive, unconfident, desperate for love and men in their lives, and other traits frequently or traditionally held of women. Furthermore, Ashley's enactment of dangerous violent racialized hegemonic masculinity in her case segment was fully under the manipulation and orders of her husband Tracey, and is thus not subversive. Hence, even when Ashley herself commits murder, this violent crime is not a subversive or transgressive act since it is committed under the

control of a man. Ashley Humphrey is therefore always portrayed on *Deadly Women* as being subordinate to a man, which thus reinforces the heterosexual matrix of power and identity (see Butler, 1990, p. 208, note 6).

Ashley Humphrey's portrayal is not as clear an example of female masculinity (c.f. Halberstam, 1998) as Jill Coit's depiction, as argued in the previous chapter. On *Deadly Women*, Coit is disguised as a moustached trucker in order to kill Gerry Boggs with the assistance of her more submissive male accomplice, Michael Backus. However, though Tracey is shown ordering Ashley to disguise herself as a black man, Ashley Humphrey's murder outfit was merely gender-neutral dark oversize clothing, a dark baseball cap, and black face paint. The racialized aspect of the black face paint is discussed more on *Deadly Women*, possibly since her clothes were merely baggy and dark and not specifically gendered. Yet, the black face paint is gendered, since Ashley is ordered to look like a black man by her husband. The black face paint is also interpreted as "makeup" (narrator) that this young and insecure girl is depicted applying to her face through the make-up compact mirror. As the narrator says: "At age nineteen, Ashley Humphrey should be putting on makeup for a night out with friends…Instead, she's getting made up for murder." Ashley Humphrey is always positioned as female/feminine on this series, since she is portrayed as subordinate, submissive, passive and other characteristics often or traditionally held of women. Ashley's depiction upholds the prevailing hegemonic perspective of how 'proper' women should act, since a criminal man coerces her into committing a brutal murder for him. This relates to Ashley Humphrey's enactment of a particular version of hegemonic masculinity on *Deadly Women*, as I argue further below. Since Ashley's victimized femininity enactment

encompasses and includes her other gender expression, I will start with an interpretation of Ashley's enactment of dangerous violent racialized hegemonic masculinity (c.f. Connell, 1995, 2002).

Application of Connell's Framework

Hegemonic masculinity is defined as the prevailing pattern of gender practice that guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant social position of men and the subordinate social position of women within patriarchal culture (Connell, 1995, p. 77). The most evident bearers of hegemonic masculinity may include those in powerful social positions, in addition to "exemplars" such as film actors and even fantasy figures such as film characters (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Connell (1995) also discusses some prerequisites to the establishment of hegemony. There must be some connection between the cultural ideal and institutional power, whether collective or individual. The successful claim to authority, whether violent or not, is also vital in establishing hegemony (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Finally, Connell (1995) argues that hegemony is a "historically mobile relation" that can be challenged and reconstructed by groups of people (p. 77-78). Connell's articulation of hegemonic masculinity applies to cases on *Deadly Women* in which the female killer is depicted as being subordinate to a man. In her case segment on the show, Ashley Humphrey adopts a racialized and murderous form of hegemonic masculinity, in being depicted committing murder while disguised in black face paint and while under the cell phone supervision of the aggressive and dominant Tracey. It is posited on *Deadly Women* that Ashley Humphrey would likely never have killed anyone in her life had it not been for Tracey, as both DeLong and Sergeant Golczewski present. Yet, the discourse regarding Ashley as the perfect target for such a controlling man—as the narrator, Phelps,

and DeLong present—implies that Ashley could have fallen prey to any such dominant and manipulative male authority figure, not only Tracey Humphrey in particular. This limits Ashley Humphrey's agency on *Deadly Women*. Thus Humphrey's 'deadliness' lies in her vulnerability and need for a man's love in her life no matter the fatal consequences to her or to other people. Humphrey's case depiction therefore serves as a cautionary tale to all women of what can happen when a weak girl falls in love with a dangerous, cruel man. Here, if a girl does not have a strong sense of her own self and her own worth, she can fall prey to a predator like Tracey, as DeLong and Sergeant Golczewski suggest in the conclusion to Ashley's case portrayal.

In this series, Ashley Humphrey is depicted committing murder, obediently following Tracey's orders. As the narrator recounts, "From the safety of his couch, Tracey Humphrey will commit murder, by remote control…Tracey is a violent rapist, up on a serious charge…Ashley's job is to silence the only witness, Tracey's victim, Sandee Rozzo." This positions Ashley as subordinate to Tracey, and as being his pawn that he can dominate and manipulate into killing for him "by remote control." The commands Tracey is depicted calmly and casually giving to Ashley over the cell phone conversation shown also highlight Ashley's subordinate position in her relationship with Tracey. In her case portrayal, writer M. William Phelps and FBI criminal profiler DeLong's particular discursive views regarding why Ashley commits murder for Tracey represent a normative, heterosexual view of women (and female killers in particular) as submissive, passive, and helpless without an assertive and authoritative man's love. This more traditional view of culturally 'acceptable' femininity relates to Ashley Humphrey's enactment of (dangerous violent racialized) hegemonic masculinity on *Deadly Women*,

since she is portrayed as a shy, vulnerable, naïve girl who commits murder under the domination of her husband. Ashley is depicted as being easily manipulated into killing Tracey's rape victim/survivor, Sandee Rozzo, who was courageous enough to press charges against her attacker.

Subordination, in Connell's (1995) sense, also applies to Ashley Humphrey's portrayal on this series. Subordinate masculinity may refer to those masculinities that are not culturally dominant in society as a whole, at the particular point in time under study (Connell, 1995, p. 78). Ashley is clearly 'subordinate' in her gender enactment, since she commits a violent murder while under the control of her husband Tracey. Although Ashley Humphrey is represented as a 'puppet' for Tracey's deadly bidding, her agency is not fully denied, but rather is severely limited. Ashley is portrayed as a young, inexperienced, vulnerable girl who desperately needs love in her life, and thus is susceptible to a manipulative and dangerous man. Although Tracey clearly had a strong influence in transforming Ashley's whole life, *she* made a mistake in entering into a relationship with such a violent man. Ashley herself let this happen to her, as the show presents. As DeLong argues, Ashley is not stupid, but rather is in such great need of love that she surrenders her own brain to such a brutish man. The cautionary tale aspect of this case reinforces how Ashley's weakness and low self-esteem was her ultimate undoing, since such traits made her susceptible to being coerced into committing a crime she may or may not have otherwise committed. DeLong, Phelps, and Sergeant Golczewski all testify to this during Ashley's case portrayal.

Yet, 'subordination' in Connell's (1995) sense could also apply to the dominance of white men and the subordination of black men in the context of the over-representation

of black men in prison. In the context of her discussion of the interactions between gender and race in particular, Connell (1995) states:

> White men's masculinities, for instance, are constructed not only in relation to white women but also in relation to black men…White fears of black men's violence have a long history in colonial and post-colonial situations. Black fears of white men's terrorism, founded in the history of colonialism, have a continuing basis in white men's control of police, courts and prisons in metropolitan countries. African-American men are massively over-represented in American prisons, as Aboriginal men are in Australian prisons (p. 75).

This relates to the racialized aspect of Ashley Humphrey's murder disguise—the black face paint—that Tracey ordered her to wear in the commission of Rozzo's murder, as I will argue further below.

Connell (1995) discusses race relations in her articulation of marginalized masculinities. In Connell's (1995) framework, marginalization pertains to the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinate ethnic groups or classes. Marginalization is always related to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group; however, this relation may also exist between subordinated masculinities (p. 80-81). In this context, Connell (1995) states:

> Race relations may also become an integral part of the dynamic between masculinities. In a white-supremacist context [or in a racially charged context such as United States culture], black masculinities play symbolic roles for white gender construction…hegemonic masculinity among whites sustains the institutional oppression and physical terror that have framed the making of masculinities in black communities (p. 80).

A possible example of this last point may be the over-representation of black men in American prisons. This may be an unstated reason for Tracey's command to Ashley to disguise herself as a black man with the black face paint during the murder. As author and expert on *Deadly Women* Phelps posits, "He figured, witnesses if they *saw* her, would think 'ah it's just a black guy'. They would describe the killer as a black guy and

that's what he wanted, to throw off the scent" (his emphasis). Furthermore, Tracey Humphrey is depicted sitting on his living room couch, eating pizza with the lights of the television flashing on his face from off screen. We see Tracey ordering Ashley, through a series of cell phone calls, to smear the face paint on her exposed skin to look like a black man, and then instructing her about how to commit the murder. Although Phelps acknowledges Tracey's purpose for the black face paint was to deliberately mislead witnesses and the police, perhaps Tracey was (without being depicted as explicitly stating so) reinforcing the stereotype of African-American men as deviant, violent and criminal, in his orders to Ashley here. Tracey Humphrey may be playing off his reading or perception of the racist stereotypical view of dominant white society's fears of black men as violent and dangerous criminals. Phelps' "'ah it's just a black guy'" attribution to Tracey and his reasoning for the black face paint appears to reinforce this particular stereotype of African-American men. Perhaps 'ah it's *just* a black guy' killing a (white) woman would stick in potential witnesses' memories or recollections and thus mislead the police, since Tracey may think this is a common occurrence within his perception of American race relations. Yet, Ashley is shown applying the black face paint to herself, through her make-up compact mirror. Thus, this 'black face' disguise suggests that Ashley also wanted to turn into someone else, to be masculine, in order to commit this murder. Ashley wanted to perform a particular (violent, masculine, racialized) identity to fit Rozzo's murder, to please Tracey and to keep his love. Hence, though this 'black face' disguise was enacted to deliberately mislead witnesses and the police, it was also performed by Ashley to get positive attention and love from her husband. In this way, Ashley's murder disguise functioned somewhat like a revealing Halloween costume, in

showing off to get (male) eyes on you and your body. Yet, in wearing a male disguise, Ashley took on the role of the dominant gender position in society (and also performed a racist stereotypical view of black men). Hence, such a costume may have boosted Ashley's confidence to carry out Tracey's deadly orders "by remote control" (narrator).

Lloyd's "Woman as Victim" Trope

Lloyd's (1995) doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis and "woman as victim" trope provide another way of understanding Ashley Humphrey's representation on *Deadly Women*. Lloyd (1995) argues that murderesses may be deemed doubly deviant and thus doubly damned, since they have not only committed a crime but have also violated traditional norms pertaining to culturally approved femininity. In the criminal justice system, women who do not conform to conventional gender stereotypes are at high risk of harsher treatment and sentences, as well as to being judged lacking as women according to such hegemonic gender norms (see also Lloyd, 1995, p. xix-xx). Yet, Ashley Humphrey's depiction counters Lloyd's (1995) hypothesis. Ashley's twenty-five year prison sentence (and her overall representation on the series) can be viewed as appropriate given the circumstances of the crime she committed. Ashley is thus not doubly damned, yet she is deviant in that she committed murder. Ashley is not doubly deviant, however, since she reinforced the conventional cultural codes regarding 'acceptable' femininity in the depiction of her as submissive and subservient to the manipulation of a violent man. In this sense, on *Deadly Women*, Ashley is not judged lacking as a woman in the traditional, androcentric/misogynistic manner that Lloyd (1995) describes but does not uphold in her study.

The cautionary tale aspect of Ashley Humphrey's case portrayal, as explained above, relates to her enactment of victimized femininity. The expert testimony in the conclusion to her portrayal—specifically that of DeLong, Phelps, and Sergeant Golczewski—represents a normalizing and gender conservative view of (lethal) women as subservient, subordinate 'victims' (or "puppet[s]", in the narrator's testimony) of a manipulative and dangerous man. Hence, Ashley Humphrey's representation on *Deadly Women* fits into the "woman as victim" stereotype (Lloyd, 1995, p. 49). To be clear, Sandee Rozzo is depicted as the actual victim throughout this case portrayal. Yet, Tracey's manipulation and coercion of Ashley also renders her as a victim of this violent man. Tracey and Ashley's union is presented as one of "total control" (narrator), and as a "master, and slave" (DeLong) relationship. Furthermore, Phelps notes how Tracey is not only physically training her in the gym, but is also "…training her mentally" to kill for "…his love."

Lloyd (1995) delineates eight androcentric/misogynistic stereotypes of violent women, which includes the woman as victim trope (p. 47-52). Although Ashley Humphrey is not portrayed in the episode as a victim of domestic violence, at least not in the sense of physical abuse, she is nevertheless depicted as a victim of Tracey's control and of her own romantic yearnings.[14] The woman as victim stereotype is one of the more recent tropes of violent women, which was aided by the work of domestic violence feminists and scholars from the 1970s on. However, the considerable focus on women as victims can deprive women of their moral agency, since passivity and blamelessness comprise part of what it means to be a victim (Lloyd, 1995, p. 49). Certainly women can

[14] This can be seen as early as the narrator's episode introduction, in which Ashley is presented as "…a love struck girl [who] becomes a deadly puppet" to the audience, thus putting primary emphasis on Ashley's enactment of lovesick victimized femininity on this television series.

be and are victims of male domestic violence; yet, we must acknowledge that women as a whole do have the potential for both crime and aggression. Awareness of such a 'victim trap' has led practitioners and scholars within this field to refer to such victimized women as survivors, thus empowering such women and emphasizing their agency (Lloyd, 1995, p. 49).

The 'woman as victim' trope evokes Morrissey's (2003) technique of victimism in denials of the human agency of female killers within the legal, feminist, and media discourses she studies. As Morrissey (2003) states, victimism denies agency through appealing to victimology theses that insist on the profound powerlessness, oppression and victimization of female murderers. In overemphasizing victimhood, agency or intentionality is overlooked. Such representations thus serve to deny such women responsibility, culpability, agency, as well as rationality, in their attempt to explain her violent crimes and obtain sympathetic or lenient treatment in the criminal justice system. Although such a strategy is beneficial in securing reduced sentences for some women, it nevertheless does not improve general social attitudes to women nor challenge the damaging myths and stereotypes concerning women (Morrissey, 2003, p. 25). However, this technique applies more to the cases of battered women who kill their abusers that Morrissey examines (2003, pp. 67-102).

However, whether Ashley Humphrey was a battered woman or not is irrelevant to this project, since representing her as a victim nevertheless reinforces a passive, infantilised, and non-agentic role that feminists and women in general have been fighting to overcome for decades (see Lloyd, 1995, p. 18). Criminal profiler DeLong implies this infantilization in her discussion with the narrator about Ashley being the ideal target for

Tracey's deadly scheme. DeLong first notes the poor models of manhood that Ashley's criminal father and brother provided in her upbringing. She then states: "…Men who have a need to control women, to control everything in their life, would not *be* attracted to a strong independent woman. They are attracted to women who are looking for Daddy" (DeLong's emphasis). The narrator concurs that this is exactly what Tracey wants, and certainly gets when he mentally coerces Ashley to kill for him. Ashley's youth is overemphasized throughout her case portrayal. She is referred to as a young, impressionable, shy, unconfident girl, who has only recently left home and is in need of someone to tell her what to do (DeLong, narrator, Phelps). The frequent references to Ashley's youth and actual age, as well as the actor's girlish and feminine facial features, in her representation on *Deadly Women* also infantilise Ashley to an extent. There is no need to repeatedly mention such traits, other than to reinforce this infantilised view of Ashley Humphrey as submissive and weak.

In this episode, Ashley is portrayed as a victim of mental/emotional/psychological control at the hands of her husband Tracey. This can be viewed as a different form of domestic violence and abuse than the standard view of such (physical) violence as Lloyd describes (1995, p. 49). Throughout her case portrayal, Ashley is depicted as a weak and compliant adolescent who kills for her husband and his love. In contrast, Tracey is depicted as being an older, very self-confident, authoritative, competent, perceptive, violent criminal. On *Deadly Women*, Ashley's naivety and desperate yearning for love are interpreted as making her an easy target for a man to manipulate her for lethal purposes. The expert testimony in the conclusion to her case portrayal presents Ashley Humphrey's enactment of naïve, vulnerable, love struck, victimized femininity as being

her ultimate downfall. Such testimony demonstrates Ashley's limited agency in her violent acts, since she is presented as entering into a controlling relationship and then killing for her husband "on her own" (prosecution witness Toby White). Although Tracey Humphrey undoubtedly played a key role in Ashley's deadly transformation, she herself made a mistake in entering into this relationship and then obediently carrying out his fatal instructions. Ashley's vulnerability and lack of self-esteem made her susceptible to Tracey's mental control and murderous plans. Ashley thus threw her *own* life away because she thought she needed to be loved by a man, as DeLong argues. Such a portrayal of Ashley Humphrey's limited agency and irrationality is rendered understandable for the audience by the testimony and depiction on *Deadly Women*.

Thus, Ashley Humphrey's representation on *Deadly Women* provides another way to understand and discuss female killers. Under the mental/psychological control of her husband Tracey, Ashley kills his rape victim, Sandee Rozzo, to prevent her from testifying against him. For this crime, Tracey received a life sentence, and Ashley received a prison term of twenty-five years. From his living room couch, Tracey commands Ashley, through a series of cell phone conversations, to smear black face paint on her hands and face to look like a black man, and then instructs Ashley on how to murder Sandee (narrator). I have therefore argued that Ashley Humphrey, as represented on this television series, enacted a version of dangerous violent racialized hegemonic masculinity (c.f. Connell, 1995, 2002) during Rozzo's murder. However, Ashley is also depicted as a weak, inexperienced, smitten girl, who was fully under Tracey's control to commit this murder. Hence, I have also argued that Ashley Humphrey's depiction fits the "woman as victim" stereotype (Lloyd, 1995, p. 49) or victimized femininity. Ashley is

portrayed as a victim of her own desperate need for romantic love in her life. However, since Ashley is made an example of by the experts during the conclusion to her case portrayal, her 'victimization' may not elicit sympathy or even empathy from those viewers who have been in controlling relationships. Here, this cautionary tale aspect severely limits Ashley's agency. Although love is necessary to live a full and happy life, Ashley's craving for romantic love not only positions her as a victim, but also as ultimately to blame for Rozzo's murder. Ashley Humphrey is thus represented as being more at fault than the abusive, criminal man who manipulated her into killing for him.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This Thesis

This thesis project has examined the representations of female violent crime on the *Deadly Women* television series through a critical gender studies theoretical framework. I have read these case portrayals through Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) performativity theory, R.W. Connell's (1995, 2002) notion of multiple masculinities and femininities, Judith Halberstam's (1998) notion of female masculinity, and Ann Lloyd's (1995) doubly deviant, doubly damned hypothesis.

Although there has been a great amount of scholarship on mass media representations of crime, there has been no examination of *Deadly Women* in particular. Thus, through undertaking a close textual analysis of *Deadly Women* aided by a critical gender studies perspective, this thesis has contributed to the existing academic body of knowledge on women, crime and the media. This project has introduced a different way to examine representations of female murderers, one which scholars (myself included) may further elaborate upon in future academic research. *Deadly Women* is important, since the series provides a way to understand how (violent) women are depicted performing their gender in a specific manner, and as having deviated from gendered social norms about what constitutes 'appropriate' feminine behaviour.

I conducted my analysis through creating episode summaries as I viewed each one. These episode summaries included scene descriptions; expert testimony/narration descriptions; the overall format or (narrative) structure of the episode; the names of the killer(s) and victim(s); descriptions of the murder(s); the criminal justice system resolutions of the cases; as well as how each killer was portrayed (the evil monster,

female masculinity, woman as victim, and so on). During this initial viewing stage, I focussed on those cases that emerged as exemplars of my critical gender studies theoretical framework. I then narrowed or 'winnowed' my sample to three cases that exemplified particular ways of understanding female killers, as represented on this television series. The first viewing aimed to capture the gist of the storyline of the case, the expert testimony and narration as well as the actors' portrayal and scenes. More detailed viewings were conducted to focus on the narration and expert testimony, and then the scenes and actors' portrayal of the actual individuals involved in the case (killers, victims, accomplices, criminal justice system personnel, and so on). I conducted additional viewings as needed to concentrate on representations of the femininity/masculinity of the killers, race/ethnicity, class, and any other potential sites of theoretical interest in the specific case. I thus conducted a close textual analysis (or close reading), aided by my theoretical framework, of these portrayals. These three cases are departures from the cultural norm of 'acceptable' womanhood, and thus can be viewed as particular performativities of violent transgressions of this gendered norm.

Analytical Implications

Media representations are important in constructing public narratives about crime. Public narratives mark the acknowledged boundaries of society's crime debate at a given time, including what is not discussed (Peelo, 2005, p. 23). In this sense, *Deadly Women* shapes and marks the bounds of how, and what in particular, we discuss about female killers. In Aileen Wuornos' case, she is primarily represented as a violent, predatory monster, though I argue that the portrayal of her own victimhood lessens the efficacy or effectiveness of her monsterization. This monsterization is emphasized through the black

and white shot of Wuornos grimacing angrily like an animal while killing the man who had tried to force her to drink from his flask.[15] It is also accentuated when the narrator frequently designates Wuornos as "the monster" even during the sympathetic portrayal of Wuornos' abusive life story, as well as during Detective Taylor's and FBI criminal profiler DeLong's testimony on Wuornos' tremendous rage and overkill and her enjoyment of killing, respectively. In Coit's case, there is much more discussion and depiction of her dangerous seductive femininity—as seen in the portrayals of her modelling, her beauty and charm, her several weddings, and so on—than of Coit's (deadly) female masculinity which is only briefly mentioned in the context of Boggs' murder. I am not sure why there is this lack of detailed analysis of Coit's moustached trucker murder disguise, but it is interesting nonetheless. Perhaps it is not further discussed due to the gender conservative and heterosexist nature of *Deadly Women*, in which Coit's (deadly) female masculinity cannot be depicted in a serious and analytical (yet still entertaining) manner, since the show must reinforce and regulate the normative boundaries of sex, gender and sexual orientation. In this view, it is better to make an example of Coit's 'deviant' gender enactment by presenting it in an unconvincing and ridiculous way, than to (re)present such an expression in a progressive, convincing manner for audiences. In Ashley Humphrey's case, her weak, naïve, infatuated, victimized femininity encompasses her murderous gender enactment, since she killed her husband's rape survivor while fully under his command. Even Ashley's murderous identity (as a black man) was completely under Tracey's control. Tracey wanted Ashley to look like a black man to "throw off the scent of the police," according to author M.

[15] Since Wuornos is depicted grasping the pistol in her bag in a shot earlier in this same scene, before any provocation on this man's part, the notion of Wuornos killing in self-defence is negated on *Deadly Women*.

William Phelps in this episode. Such a racialized aspect to Ashley's dangerous and violent hegemonic masculinity enactment is presented in a reasonable and intelligible manner, and thus does not garner any further discussion about why Tracey wanted her to look like a *black* man specifically. Why were Tracey's orders racialized in this way? Why did Tracey not order Ashley to just look like a man? Furthermore, Ashley is always portrayed during her case segment as vulnerable, love struck, inexperienced, a "deadly puppet" (narrator), and other such negative gendered terms. This cohesion and stability renders her gender performativity as that of victimized femininity, as a girl whose agency is severely limited due to her relinquishing her mind to a violent criminal man's control. The conclusion to her portrayal supports this cautionary tale aspect of her case. Ashley committed murder and threw her own life away because she believed she needed a man and his love (DeLong). Sergeant Golczewski believes that Ashley would have never killed anyone in her life had she not met Tracey Humphrey.

Gender identity is in a perpetual process of 'becoming' (Butler, 1990). We are not born masculine or feminine, but rather continually enact and perform our gender (Connell, 2002, p. 4). What it means to be a man or a woman is produced and sustained through clothing, acts, gestures and so forth (Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2004, p. 348). Each of the chosen case portrayals highlights how such female killers donned a particular disguise or costume in order to commit their crimes. In this sense, such violent women enacted their femininity through dressing to kill. Although she did not wear an actual murder disguise, Aileen Wuornos enacted a Damsel in Distress form of femininity on the highway to entice men into assisting what appeared to be a helpless female hitchhiker, but was actually a monstrous predatory female killer. Ashley Humphrey

disguised herself to look like a black man in the murder of her husband's rape victim/survivor. Jill Coit wore a moustache and men's clothing to brutally kill one of her husbands, and also donned a red dress to murder another husband.

Deadly Women presents the fact of Jill Coit and Ashley Humphrey's murder disguises, since both women did wear their respective costumes to kill (see, for instance, Tisch, 2005, and Weller, 1993). Yet, the series does not elaborate on the use of such (inadequate, masculine, racialized) costumes. The most obvious reason to wear a disguise is to conceal one's identity from potential witnesses. Yet, Coit and Humphrey's respective outfits both failed to hide their feminine identities. Wuornos did not wear an actual disguise, so this does not apply to her. People also wear disguises in order to enact a particular identity to fit a certain situation, in the view of the person wearing the outfit. Hence, people put on a 'fantasized' identity to act (or act out) in a specific and 'abnormal' way, such as on Halloween. Wuornos' ploy of Damsel in Distress femininity allowed her to enact a fantasized or imagined identity to get male drivers to stop and help her. She then twisted this fantasized form of femininity into something predatory and murderous, since she used it to entrap men in her deadly scheme. Jill Coit and Ashley Humphrey both adopted fantasized male identities in their respective murder disguises, thus both took on the role of the dominant gender position in society. Thus, such costumes bolstered their confidence and power in carrying out murders, through taking on this powerful role. Aileen Wuornos' 'disguise' or pose of Damsel in Distress femininity also boosted her confidence and power in this sense, since she employed it as a trick to ensnare and then kill men who transported her and/or solicited her sexual services.

Television producers ultimately want to attract audiences and thus increase their profit margins, and so they must sacrifice any controversial positions (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, p. 91). This relates to the formulaic nature of all television programming. On *Deadly Women*, the vast majority of the violent women represented are arrested and sentenced via the criminal justice or psychiatric systems. This also relates to how these three cases are represented in gender normative ways. Specifically, Aileen Wuornos is monsterized, and Jill Coit's (deadly) female masculinity is barely discussed. Ashley Humphrey's enactment of subservient, victimized femininity is presented as making her more at fault than the violent man who mentally coerced her to kill for him. Such formulaic narratives of punishment for violent women's gender enactments not only aim to boost profits, but also to comfort and reassure audiences that such monstrous or vicious women have been contained by the criminal justice or psychiatric systems and thus no longer pose a deadly threat to society and its normative ideals about sex and gender. Such repetitive formulas cater to audience expectations by tapping into the viewers' dormant fearful fascination of female (violent) criminality. Here, storylines and characters are often organized around simplistic morality (or cautionary) tales where good triumphs over evil (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, p. 90).

Yet, themes (i.e. types of female killers and their crimes) are repeated throughout this series from season to season. For instance, female (serial) killers are generally considered predators, monsters or inhuman. Killings motivated by revenge are frequently portrayed throughout *Deadly Women*. Female killers are also often depicted as being under the control of a more deviant male partner in the commission of their violent crimes. Such a closed/circular ending reinforces the prevalent (gender) conservative view

of society, which suggests that progress and change are impossible. This type of ending also highlights that female violent criminality is a recurring problem in people and in society (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2005, p. 250), which is a defeatist and unproductive perspective on the possibility of social change.

Deadly Women is now in its eighth season, including the mini-series. It is clearly popular among its audience, thus increasing the producers' profit margins, which is their ultimate goal. People clearly derive some form of pleasure in viewing *Deadly Women*, or they would simply change television channels or turn off their televisions altogether. This series airs during primetime viewing hours, drawing in an audience that has at least started to unwind from their workday stresses. This show provides a dark, dramatic, sensationalistic, violence and action-packed form of entertainment for audiences, most of whom would never actually commit such crimes. *Deadly Women* can thus act as a form of stress-relief, or catharsis, for such audiences. Catharsis refers to "the expression and release, or purging, of emotions by audiences at the climax of a tragedy or drama" (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2005, p. 456). We are intrigued and enthralled with images of violence, destruction and death, because it draws us away from the boring, mundane routine of our 'normal' lives. This can be seen not only in the proliferation of (true) crime television series and films, but also in our reaction to real-life disasters, such as stopping our cars to gawk at a car crash. This goes back through history, such as the Roman times of gladiators fighting to the death, human sacrifice and public executions. Such violence provides a thrilling jolt to our senses that distracts us from our 'normal' routines. In watching *Deadly Women*, audiences may also feel a pleasurable thrill or scare due to the fact that such violence is happening to 'others' and not 'us.' By 'othering' and

sensationalizing such violence, audiences do not have to feel ashamed in enjoying *Deadly Women*. Since the vast majority of the female killers portrayed on this series have been caught and punished, audiences may also feel a pleasant cathartic release when they learn that the gendered systems of social control have ultimately worked to keep 'us' safe.

Watching violent imagery may also provide a vicarious thrill to some audiences, since they can watch other people act out their darkest desires without having to personally suffer the consequences. Whether they are attracted to the gory violence itself or merely to the images of people acting out their (violent) power and agency, such audiences may identify with the spectacle of female violence on *Deadly Women*.

I also found it interesting how differently Ashley Humphrey and Michael Backus were represented on *Deadly Women*. Although both were manipulated into committing (or helping to commit) a violent murder, only Ashley Humphrey is discussed in a negative gendered way, as a naïve and vulnerable girl who surrendered her brain to a brutish man's control. In contrast, Michael Backus is represented as an accomplice to Jill Coit getting revenge on Gerry Boggs for annulling their marriage and thus thwarting Coit's plans to get Boggs' money. The narrator states that to get this revenge, Coit "…tangles a new man in her deadly web, Michael Backus." Detective Devalle elaborates that Coit convinced Backus that Boggs was "bad", and that "…the only way to get rid of this bad person, is to kill him." It is time that we stop denigrating and punishing women for enacting their gender in ways that defy cultural gender stereotypes and norms. I am not saying that female killers (specifically the three I have analyzed here) do not deserve the punishment they received for the horrendous murders they committed. Rather, I am arguing that it is unfair to represent women in negative gendered terms for behaviour that

is not defined or gendered in the same way when a man commits similar actions, as in the case of Ashley Humphrey's and Michael Backus' depictions on this television series. Gender should no longer be thought of as merely a binary system of opposing ideals with no "grey" area in between the poles. We should take a more empathetic or sympathetic viewpoint that does not 'other' those individuals and groups who enact their gender identities (non-violently) in ways that differ from the norm. As Jewkes (2011) argues, "…the media tap into, and magnify, deep-seated public fears about deviant women, while paying much less attention to equally serious male offenders whose profile does not meet the psychosocial criteria of 'otherness'" (p. 123).

Since media representations are crucial in transmitting particular perspectives about the social world and the people and phenomena within it, the ways in which gender and crime are (re)presented to us in the media are also extremely important. Therefore, specific representations of female killers (such as the three analyzed in this thesis) show quite a bit about how (violent) women are perceived culturally. Popular media is undoubtedly fascinated with images and portrayals of women who kill, as the proliferation of true crime television shows on the subject matter demonstrates. Such sensationalistic and dramatic depictions of female murderers, such as *Deadly Women*, intrigue and entertain viewers. A former classmate of mine in a graduate-level course told me she watched a marathon of *Deadly Women* when she was pregnant. She did not know why she watched it when she was pregnant, of all times to watch violent media images. Yet, we did have a brief discussion of our mutual interest in true crime series, and how when women are portrayed committing murder, this is "made into this huge deal," in her words. This is troubling, since men's violence is not portrayed in such a manner (or to the

same extent), through techniques of monsterization, oversexualization, othering, dehumanization, and so forth. Such differing representations of men's violence as compared to women's violence perpetuate a particular, conservative, heterosexist perspective of female killers and of women in general. For if women are supposed to be passive and nurturing and hence not aggressive and active, then this may have ramifications for how women are expected to behave in social life generally, not just in the realm of crime. For instance, how can women, for instance, negotiate higher salaries and promotions at work if they are told and expected to be passive? Certain situations, like the one above, call for (pro)active, engaged, assertive, and persuasive traits and behaviour. In such situations, women may express such 'masculine' traits as a way to gain power in a patriarchal culture (see Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006, p. 43-44). This is obviously not to advocate violence in any area of social life, but rather to advocate for a view of gender that is more empathetic (or sympathetic) and accounts for the spectrum of gender attributes for men and women alike. Men and women should not be punished for enacting certain (non-violent) gender expressions or traits that are viewed as oppositional to their biological sex by people in positions of power and hegemonic models of socially 'acceptable' masculinity or femininity. Women should not be deemed doubly deviant (Lloyd, 1995) for having committed violent crime and thus having transgressed conventional cultural norms and codes of 'proper' femininity. Rather, all forms of gender enactments (even subversive or violent ones) should be understood in a more nuanced, inclusive and non-pathologizing manner. As Halberstam (1998) articulates, "Precisely because virtually nobody fits the definitions of male and female, the categories gain

power and currency from their impossibility. In other words, the very flexibility and elasticity of the terms “man” and “woman” ensures their longevity” (p. 27).

Contributions and Areas for Future Research

This thesis has contributed to the extant criminological literature in several ways. Through undertaking a close textual analysis of this television series aided by a critical gender studies theoretical lens, this project has provided a different method or technique to study media representations of female killers. Other scholars (as well as myself) may elaborate upon this method in future academic research. This thesis has also introduced the television series *Deadly Women* to the criminological literature as another unit of analysis to examine women, crime and the media. Since there has been no prior academic research on *Deadly Women* in particular, scholars (myself included) may further analyze the series in future academic work. *Deadly Women* is now in its eighth season, including the mini-series, so there is a large quantity of real-life cases represented on the show to examine, using a variety of methodologies.

This thesis project has introduced several areas for future research. Future scholars could subject this television series to different methodologies including, but not limited to, statistical analysis and qualitative or quantitative content analysis. A comparative case study analysis could also be conducted on *Deadly Women*. A materialist analysis of the economics of Aileen Wuornos’ case (as an impoverished prostitute) could also be undertaken in future studies. Lloyd’s (1995) hypothesis could be applied to a larger sample of cases portrayed on *Deadly Women*, such as my entire sample of forty-six episodes or one hundred and thirty-eight cases total. Such research could examine whether the series portrays female killers as doubly deviant and thus

doubly damned in the context of this (or an even larger) sample of represented cases. Are the criminal justice system resolutions of these cases portrayed as harsh or lenient? Are the particular depictions of the female killers themselves portrayed as lenient or harsh? Future scholars could also compare and contrast the female killers' depictions on *Deadly Women* and their representations on other true crime television series. For instance, Theresa Knorr has been portrayed on both *Deadly Women* ("The Sacred Bond," season 4, episode 7) and on *Cold Case Files* on *A&E* channel. What are the similarities and the differences between Aileen Wuornos' roughly fifteen to twenty minute portrayal on *Deadly Women* and her roughly forty-four minute representation on *Born to Kill?* on the *Investigation Discovery Channel*? *Born to Kill?*, produced in the United Kingdom, examines actual infamous murders from around the world and reveals the psychology of each killer to determine why they were driven to kill (Anderson, 2013). Future scholars could also compare and contrast the portrayals of female killers on *Deadly Women* and those on fictional crime television series, such as *Criminal Minds*. How are female murderers represented on each type of television series?

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