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Reading Between the Lines: An Intersectional Media Analysis of Female Sex Offenders in Florida Newspapers

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Reading between the Lines: An Intersectional Media Analysis of Female Sex Offenders
in Florida Newspapers

by

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DEDICATION

For my mommy: We did it.

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The road to PhD has been complex and dissertation life has been exhausting. But my survival through it all is thanks in large part to a group of people who supported me, challenged me, and stuck out this ride with me. I am infinitely grateful to my committee co-chairs Drs. Deena Isom Scott and John Burrow, as well as, committee members Drs. Tia Stevens Andersen and Shirley Staples Carter – better known as My Squad. Their combined brilliance and feedback always propelled me forward, even if I struggled to accept it. I thank them for helping me grow as a researcher, writer, and overall scholar.

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ABSTRACT

The media is one of the furthest reaching social institutions of our society. It is a source of white patriarchal ideologies and a vehicle through which they are communicated. Female sex offenders represent a nexus of prescribed social and legal violations. This dissertation examines the reinforcement of patriarchal ideas in media coverage of female sex offenders by posing the question: how are female sex offenders portrayed in the media? Specifically, how are those portrayals racialized? Using an intersectional lens, this study employs a qualitative content analysis to examine the top five circulating newspapers in Florida and their coverage of female teachers who have been convicted of having sex with adolescent male students. The findings reveal themes of Blameworthiness & Accountability, Bourgeois Standards of Womanhood, and Threat & Dangerousness. These findings reveal that through the inclusion or exclusion of certain discourse about female sex offenders, newspapers perpetuate racialized and gendered expectations of women, generally, and implicitly reinforce controlling images of women of Color.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, Debra Lafave, a middle school teacher in Hillsborough County, Florida pleaded guilty to lewd or lascivious battery after having sex with a 14-year-old male student. She was required to register as a sex offender and sentenced to three years of house arrest and seven years on probation. How could a teacher have sex with an underage student and avoid jail time? Various news sources quoted Lafave's lawyer stating, "to place Debbie into a Florida state women's penitentiary, to place an attractive young woman in that kind of hell hole, is like putting a piece of raw meat in with the lions" (Carnes, 2006). In other words, Lafave was too pretty and would be unsafe if sent to prison. Following those words, the media became obsessed with Lafave's beauty – a white woman with blonde hair and blue eyes – and she gained notoriety as the face of "hot" teacher-underage student relationships and the yard stick by which subsequent sex scandals would be measured. Would the judge be as lenient for a man? Would the media be equally focused on physical attractiveness in lieu of culpability and punishment? Few people would argue that the outcomes would be the same for a male teacher and female student.

Women who are accused of predatory offenses, when compared to men accused of similar crimes, experience different social responses. Within a patriarchal society, men dominate women and what is considered masculine is more valued compared to what is considered feminine (Chesney-Lind, 2006). Masculinity in opposition to femininity

implies a dichotomy of gender (culturally assigned roles) and sex (biology). Specifically, this assertion contributes to the placement of masculinity and maleness as superior to femininity and femaleness. The concepts of masculinity and femininity are “framed within a heteronormative conception of gender that essentializes male-female differences and ignores difference and exclusion within the gender categories” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836). This observation is significant because traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity coupled with entrenched patriarchy make it difficult for society to acknowledge victimization committed by women and girls, particularly, traditionally male crimes such as sexual assault (Brayford, 2012; Hayes & Carpenter, 2010). In fact, it is patriarchy in combination with traditional gender expectations that may lead society to actually *reject* women’s engagement in predatory, sexual behaviors in favor of the sexual victimization of women. Patriarchy, however, is but one among multiple social institutions that governs the way in which society understands victimization and criminal involvement.

News stories, especially those involving crime, provide a narrative that crime is violent, widespread, rampant, and inevitable (Callanan, 2012). Media outlets often use crime as the primary subject matter (Klite, Bardwell, & Salzman, 1997), sometimes dedicating over 75 percent of television time to covering crime (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). “Stories about crime provide several necessary ingredients for the successful marketing of news—concrete events with powerful impact on ordinary people, drama and emotion, and, above all, attention-getting visuals” (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000, p. 560). When reporting crime, the media follows a script that paints a picture of violent youth and/or violent people of Color (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998; 2000). A script is “a coherent

sequence of events expected by the individual, involving him either as a participant or as an observer” (Abelson, 1976, p. 33; see also Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). The call for “action news” to drive viewer ratings has created a need for a crime narrative, or script, which is centered on two main components. First, the portrayal of crime as violent dominates coverage of crime. Instances of homicides, gang activities, and home burglaries perpetuate the public assumption that crime automatically leads to serious injury or loss of life, regardless of crime statistics showing the opposite (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). Second, the media script assigns a cast of characters in which the clear majority of criminals are non-white men (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). The information received by media consumers about crime suspects, particularly in television news, is largely visual with the sharing of mug shots, security camera video, police descriptions, and the like (Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996). This translates to identification of race or ethnicity as the most easily recognizable attribute of the perpetrator. Thus, the public associates crime with injury-threatening violence and race/ethnicity, regardless of other factors that may be presented. The emphasis on offenders of Color plays into the “attention getting visuals” that media scholars deem inherently necessary for profitable ratings (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). The non-white offender supports the stereotypical narrative of a white supremacist society that depicts Black or Brown skin as criminal and violent (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997). Female sex offenders, however, seem to be the exception.

The offender-victim dichotomy of sex offense crimes is challenged in media portrayals of female sex offenders compared to their male counterparts. In cases involving female offenders, there is a reliance on the visual depiction of the perpetrator.

There is a focus on women's physical appearance that is not seen with male offenders. The hot teacher, the Cougar, and the sexy babysitter are the stereotypical archetypes of the female sexual offender. For example, female offenders who victimize teenage boys are categorized as pretty or attractive. When the victim is an adolescent, the media may be more inclined to refer to the offender's physical beauty, slender body, or overall attractiveness. Inversely, photos of female offenders who abuse children may depict a "criminal body" that reinforces the notion that criminals can be physically identified (Barlow & Lynes, 2015; see also Horn, 2003). Specifically, women who engage in sexual abuse of young children are visually shown to lack feminine traits (e.g., larger bodily frames, conventionally unattractive features). These women are portrayed as evil and lacking the nurturing characteristics inherently belonging to women. On the other hand, men, while still considered evil, are not viewed as abnormal or unnatural in their predatory actions (Barlow & Lynes, 2015). Instead, there is a social expectation, even acceptance, that men's sexual pursuits of women are predatory in nature.

While much of the extant literature suggests that men are statistically more likely to be both victims and offenders (National Institute of Justice, 2017), the gendered coverage of crime in the media relies heavily on social constructs of how men and women are traditionally perceived (Meloy & Miller, 2009). That is, women are the victims and men are the perpetrators (Berns, 2001). This rhetoric supports the narrative that men are predatory and aggressive while women are docile and weak. Furthermore, people of Color, particularly African Americans, have historically been overrepresented as criminals in the news (Dixon, 2008). In fact, the portrayal of the violent Black man is an image that has maintained its mark and influence on the public consciousness since

slavery. News coverage of crime exploits white fear of Black violence (Entman & Rojecki, 2000), specifically Black male violence. Recently, however, there has been a growth of research which takes a feminist approach to examining the female offender and the media (Humphries, 2009; McQueeney & Girgenti-Malone, 2018). Despite this growth, there is a paucity of research that takes an intersectional approach to examining the female offender of Color and the media (Andersen, Isom Scott, & Collins, 2018). In other words, there is very little research that considers the duality of identifying as both a woman and a person of Color when discussing criminal behavior in the media. Overall, there is an absence of intersectional research that studies gender and racial differences in media depictions and coverage of those accused of sex crimes.

Historically, women's portrayal in the media, be it film, advertising, print, and other outlets have served to reinforce stereotypes and traditionally prescribed gender roles (Mulvey, 1975). These roles subscribe to the expectation that women exist as extensions of men, usually as either wives or mothers (Sharma, 2012). Furthermore, women of Color in media have traditionally been depicted as hypersexual seductresses, submissive servants, or objects for white male fetishizing (Brooks & Hebert, 2006). Few media products showcase women in positive lights that highlight their success and contributions, independent of men. Notwithstanding the lack of positive images, women are also overlooked in news media, particularly news stories surrounding criminal involvement. This oversight may be due in part to a conflict between traditional gender roles of women and the crime scripts of news outlets. Though there are examples in the extant literature that discuss the role of the media in portraying people of Color as inherently violent and criminal (see Entman & Rojecki, 2000) and the portrayal of female

offenders in the media (see Humphries, 2009), there are comparatively fewer studies that have explicitly evaluated the language used to describe offenders who are girls or women of Color (see McQueeney & Girgenti-Malone, 2018). This dissertation project is designed to address this gap in the literature. As such, the following question guides this research: How are female sex offenders portrayed in the media; and, how are those depictions racialized? To answer these questions, this dissertation draws from four bodies of research: the social construction of gender, female sex offenders, media coverage of crime, and intersectionality.

Chapter two of this dissertation presents the social construction of masculinity and femininity and the criminal justice system's role in its enforcement. Then, chapter two discusses the social conditions and theoretical assumptions that support and reinforce the construction of female offenders, people of Color, and sex offenders in the media. Additionally, the second chapter examines how assumptions about gender and race inform socio-legal and societal responses to women, and particularly women of Color, who are accused of criminal sexual actions. Lastly, the second chapter addresses the historical images of women of Color informed by racist and sexist ideologies and how such depictions have helped to shape the language used to describe female offenders of Color.

Chapter three presents an intersectional qualitative methodology and conceptualization of key themes. Specifically, the chapter outlines the justification for using a case study research design and qualitative content analysis to examine newspaper articles' discourse regarding women and sex offending behavior. Additionally, the third chapter provides examples and explanation of the coding frame used for the analysis.

Then, chapter four presents the results of the qualitative content analysis. Finally, chapter five summarizes the study, as well as provides conclusions, implications, limitations, and directions for the future of this research.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS: GENDER, SEX OFFENDING, & MEDIA

Men and women occupy very specific social spaces in terms of their participation in victimizing others and the criminal justice system's response to their criminal involvement. Within the conventional gender binary, society has long painted the picture of women as fragile beings in constant jeopardy of being victimized and in need of protection. On the other hand, men have been presented as strong and violent, filling roles as either the savior or the aggressor (Brownmiller, 1975; Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996). Victimization against women, especially sexual victimization, serves to reinforce male dominance by placing women in an oppressed status that expects and accepts some abuse. However, victimization by women, especially sexual victimization, is all but ignored as an unfathomable departure from the traditional gender roles expected within a patriarchal society (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996; Embry & Lyons, 2012; Smith, Pine, & Hawley, 1988). Patriarchy is a system of social stratification in which social control policies and practices are in place to ratify and reinforce male power and privilege to keep girls and women subordinate to men (Renzetti & Curran, 1999, p. 3). One of this study's larger goals is to examine the ways in which the cyclical relationship between media and patriarchy emphasizes the reach of male superiority and female inferiority by highlighting the mass media's role as a prime social institution that maintains gender inequality through the communication of patriarchal ideologies. Mass media outlets, including television, film, newspapers, and the like, serve as one of the most far reaching

carriers of information. It is a vehicle through which society receives a plethora of thoughts, ideas, and opinions (Sharma, 2002). As such, it is also a social institution that informs the worldview of those who consume it. Patriarchal values and perceptions of crime and criminals are described and reinforced in the media. For example, reports of domestic violence among professional athletes, crime drama television shows such as Law and Order: SVU, and the myriad of Hollywood sexual abuse stories inspiring the #MeToo movement reinforce male dominance and female inferiority. Virtually all forms of media serve to perpetuate stereotypes about social expectations of acceptable victims and ‘likely’ offenders.

This chapter first discusses traditional sources of socially established gender roles. Next, using an intersectional feminist lens, this chapter summarizes applicable theories of women’s offending and reviews the female sex offender literature. Finally, this chapter examines the historical and contemporary images of women of Color in the media, while paying particular attention to how those images influence depictions of female offenders of Color

Gender: Constructed and Perpetuated

Chivalry, a medieval institution of knighthood, was popular during the Middle Ages. It emphasized a code of military expertise, bravery, and courtesy towards women. Once it faded from use as an institution of knighthood, chivalry became the standard of manners for gentlemen toward ladies (Moulds, 1978). Paternalism, on the other hand, is rooted in the practices of a father towards a child. It is a set of behaviors or policies “by a superior toward an inferior resembling that of a male parent to his child” (Moulds, 1978, p. 418). These behaviors are generally viewed by the superior to be in the best interests of

the subordinate. Moulds (1978) outlines three basic tenets of paternalism: first, a child is defenseless and requires assistance. Second, a child is not fully aware of or responsible for her/his actions and requires guidance. Lastly, a child is ignorant and can be tricked into unknowingly serving the interests of adults (p. 418). These tenets are interwoven in the infantilization of women and the assumption that women must be cared for by men. It is paternalism in conjunction with patriarchal ideals (such as social constructions of femininity and women as weak) that allow or enforce the perpetuation of chivalry. In criminological research, particularly feminist criminology, the terms ‘chivalry hypothesis’ and ‘paternalism’ are often used interchangeably (Embry & Lyons, 2012; Franklin & Fearn, 2008).¹ The chivalry hypothesis, or paternalism, posits that when compared to similarly-situated male offenders, women who commit crimes generally receive more lenient treatment from the criminal justice system (Grabe, Trager, Lear, & Rauch, 2006).² With a female offender, police are less likely to make an arrest, judges are more likely to consider mitigating factors and sentence less harshly, and women generally face less punitive correctional sanctions (Adler, 1975; Chesney-Lind, 1986; Gruhl, Welch, & Spohn, 1984). Some chivalry and paternalism scholars also argue that female offenders are perceived to be less dangerous or threatening and too weak or fragile to warrant prison (Bontrager, Barrick, & Stupi, 2013; Gruhl et al., 1984).

Chivalry-paternalism influences the way women are regarded within the criminal justice system both as victims and victimizers in a way that is described as theorizing

¹ This has less to do with the manners and fatherly protection foundations and more to do with the shared ideals surrounding women as weak, child-like, and in need of constant male protection; thus, the control of women and girls is justified (Morash & Schram, 2002). As such, they are used here, synonymously.

² This leniency is seen most prominently at the sentencing phase (Embry & Lyons, 2012; Koons-Witt, 2002).

patriarchy and crime, which focuses on how definitions of crime and criminals and the criminal justice system perpetuate patriarchal worldviews (Chesney-Lind, 2006). For example, scholars often point to the focal concerns theory as a subset to the broader chivalry research. Focal concerns theory states that courts consider social and practical costs associated with sanctions imposed on women, specifically pertaining to the incarceration of mothers (Bontrager et al., 2013; Embry & Lyons, 2012; Koons-Witt, 2002; Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998). According to focal concerns theory, women are viewed as primary caregivers of children and their imprisonment disrupts the family. As a result of mothers being imprisoned, the burden of caring for children would fall on the rest of society. Therefore, judges employ chivalrous practices for the primary purpose of preserving the family unit (Koons-Witt, 2002; Steffensmeier et al., 1998). Theorizing patriarchy and crime is important to this research given the gendered nature of sex offenses and the deviation from traditional gender roles of female sex offenders.

The dominant patriarchal culture limits the ways in which the criminal justice system responds to victimization by and against women; Koons-Witt (2002) states that the patriarchal model of justice situates traditional gender role expectations at the center of how women are processed in the criminal justice system.³ Women are either viewed as weak beings in need of constant protection or they are staunchly vilified for deviating from gender roles (Embry & Lyons, 2012). The vilification of women is evident through the historical punishment of “witches and whores” to enforce the notion of good women staying in their place (Chesney-Lind, 1986, p. 78). Even the chivalrous “protection” of

³ Koons-Witt (2002) specifically looks at gendered sentencing differences. Many of the theoretical arguments presented, however, can also be applied to differences in gender and expected/accepted victimization.

women is rooted in patriarchal motives. Girls' over-representation in juvenile proceedings, for example, is more about suppressing their sexuality and criminalizing promiscuity than protecting girls from being sexually victimized within or outside the home (Carr, Hudson, Hanks, & Hunt, 2008). Chesney-Lind (1986) best summarizes this bastardization of chivalry in the criminal justice system stating, "the response of the criminal justice system to women's deviance falls far short of chivalrous despite rhetoric to the contrary. It is increasingly evident that both the construction of women's defiance and society's response to it are colored by women's status as male sexual property...her behavior is scrutinized for evidence that she is beyond the control of patriarchy" (p. 96). In other words, the criminal justice system's treatment of women is not chivalrous in nature. Instead, women are judged based on their position in relation to men, specifically sexual subordination, and whether or not women conform to the rules of a patriarchal society. Morash and Schram (2002) argue similarly that chivalrous treatment of women in the justice system is actually "political paternalism" (p. 6). In order to receive chivalrous protections, women must pay in the form of acknowledgement, acceptance, and conformity to their inferior social status (Morash & Schram, 2002).

Despite chivalry's questionable role in the justice system, chivalry-paternalism ideologies are not evenly applied across all women in regard to criminal justice policies and practices. Specifically, these demarcations are established across lines of race and social class. Chivalry, historically, was intended to protect the chastity of white women as a white patriarchal practice (Agozino, 1997; Brownmiller, 1975). It should not be assumed to have the same effects for women of Color as for white women. Furthermore, the racialized nature of traditional gender roles serves to further pit women of Color

against the white, male-dominated criminal justice system. Women of Color, particularly Black women, have historically been masculinized or viewed as less feminine than their white counterparts (Young, 1986), some scholars going as far as stating that gender roles between Black women and Black men have converged and are not clearly separated (Visher, 1983). Therefore, women of Color are less likely to reap the “benefits” of chivalry-paternalism based criminal justice policies in both protection from men as victims and protection from the harshness of the criminal justice system as offenders.

Additionally, hegemonic masculinity posits that men and women exist in a relationship predicated on oppression and dependence (Connell, 1993).⁴ This relationship has been shown to manifest in mothers’ and wives’ preferential treatment in courts and sentencing compared to single, independent women. A woman’s conformity to traditional gender roles is directly associated with her respectability in the eyes of the criminal justice system. Women who are more respectable by abiding by the rules of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity reap the benefits of chivalry-paternalism.⁵ In fact, some argue that the criminal justice system actually enforces traditional sex roles in place of the law (Chesney-Lind, 1986).

⁴ As the superior standard in the hierarchy of masculinity, the hegemonic man expresses his masculinity through heterosexuality and homophobia. He views women as sexual objects and is in constant competition with other men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2000). Generally, hegemonic masculinity is a way of “doing gender” that emphasizes male dominance and the subordination of women (Charlebois, 2013; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

⁵ Emphasized femininity is a concept posed by Connell (1987) that suggests there is no hegemonic femininity that is superior to all other femininities among women, the way hegemonic masculinity is regarded for men, because all forms of femininity are constructed to subordinate women to men. Though, emphasized femininity is one form which is “defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (p. 184).

Application of the chivalry hypothesis differs along the lines of worthiness, which are determined by adherence to socially prescribed gender roles (Koons-Witt, 2002). Adler (1975) states, “the prejudicial permissiveness with which society cloaks and protects most kinds of female deviance is bitterly stripped away from those whose deviancy crosses a critical threshold of social tolerance” (p.240). These protections are only given when the woman “fits the mold of a specific construction of femininity” (Bontrager et al., 2013, p. 353). In sum, conformity to patriarchal expectations of femininity yields leniency. For example, when women offend, they are likely to be painted as either bad (inherently deviant) or mad (mentally ill and needing treatment rather than punishment) (Dirks, Heldman, & Zack, 2015). Within this bad/mad dichotomy exists a racialized application of these titles, where white skin equals mad and Black or Brown skin equals bad. White women who engage in nonviolent criminal offenses, such as theft, are less likely to be prosecuted (Dirks et al., 2015). This is particularly true of white women who “conformed to bourgeois standards of womanhood” (Odem, 1992, p. 361) such as virginity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Brownmiller, 1975; Dirks et al., 2015). However, quite the opposite is true for women of Color who are heavily policed and prosecuted for the same crimes (Dirks et al., 2015; Odem, 1992).

Chivalry-paternalism has changed how the criminal justice system responds to victimization by women in its selective application to women who commit certain types of crimes. This selective chivalry is often referred to as ‘the evil woman hypothesis.’ The evil woman hypothesis argues that in cases where there is both a violation of law and violation of prescribed gender roles, “female offenders will be treated more harshly than

males in sentencing decisions because they have committed a double offense” (Bontrager et al, 1995, p. 355; Crew, 1991). Women who commit more ‘feminine’ offenses are afforded chivalrous protections such as the leniency of paternalism. However, those who commit crimes that are traditionally viewed as ‘masculine’ are more likely to receive more punitive sanctions (Morash & Schram, 2002). This disparate application of justice is rooted in social standards of gender conformity (Chesney-Lind, 1986; Koons-Witt, 2002). Essentially, those who commit the crimes of men will receive punishments similar to men. This heightened harshness is reserved for those who commit the most egregious offense of deviating from gender norms. Such ‘moral transgressions,’ in this instance sex crime, may warrant that white women receive more punitive punishments compared to women of Color who are expected to engage in such behavior due to historical stereotypes of sexual insatiability (Dirks et al., 2015). For example, one study found that police interactions with Black women were largely based on behavioral expectations of Black females that conflicted with “behavioral expectations of women who were deserving of chivalrous treatment” (Visher, 1983, p. 17), meaning police interactions with Black women were fueled by stereotypes of Black femininity as an unacceptable form of femininity.

Black femininity, according to Young (1986), has generally been viewed in the following ways: as an assertive and masculine Amazon, a dangerous and emasculating “sinister Sapphire,” the long-suffering mammy, or the immoral and hypersexual seductress. The Amazon is capable of protecting and defending herself. Therefore, there is no need to keep her out of prison. Additionally, she is inherently violent so, there is no need to intervene on her behalf if she should find herself a victim. The “sinister Sapphire”

deserves the harsher punishment of incarceration, and her victimization is of her own doing as a vindictive castrator. A Black woman identified as the mammy is strong and can withstand victimization and endure the atrocities of prisons. Lastly, the lustful seductress is loose and can never be a legitimate victim of any violence she experiences (Young, 1986). Such classifications are salient in the way African American women are treated within the criminal justice system, especially compared to their Black male and white female counterparts.

The application of the evil woman hypothesis, however, is most prominent for women who commit sex offenses, particularly those against children (Embry & Lyons, 2012), “committing a sexual offense as a female is recognized as an abhorrent break from traditional gender roles and the norms of society” (p. 152). Not only are sex offenses perceived to be crimes committed by predatory men, but as primary caregivers, women who victimize children are especially vilified for violating established gender roles and norms. Historically, sex offenses have maintained the subordination and marginalization of women. However, sex offenses committed by women are considered the most heinous departure from gender norms and are particularly worthy of society’s scorn regardless of racial identity.

Historical rape culture: How men have controlled sex

Patriarchal societies that emphasize values such as control, aggression, and dominance facilitate a culture that produces rapists (Herman, 1984). Additionally, when sex is constructed as something that is done by men to women (Basow, 1992), rape culture is inherently rooted in the fabric of patriarchal society. In discussing the role of rape in patriarchal society, Brownmiller (1975) states, “from prehistoric times to the

present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (p. 15) . She continues stating, “the historic price of woman’s protection by man against man was the imposition of chastity and monogamy. A crime committed against her body became a crime against the male estate” (p. 17). Rape is used as a tool to scare women into submission, specifically conformity to values of purity and inferiority. This is the essence of rape culture. Brownmiller’s (1975) assessment of the historical significance of rape culture is particularly salient when discussing how gendered perceptions of offenders and victims have impacted the public’s ideas about ‘real victims’ or probable offenders. Rape throughout time has been a phenomenon “rooted in an ever-present male project of subordinating and oppressing women” (D’Cruze, 1993, p. 378). In rape-prone patriarchal societies, the encouragement of masculinity almost requires that male sexuality be associated with violence (Tomaselli & Porter, 1986). Sexuality exists as an “expression and contest of patriarchal power relations...and violence is one means of appropriating and consolidating power within those relations (D’Cruze, 1993, p. 378). This may explain why women in cultures that have more egalitarian gender dynamics experience less rape (D’Cruze, 1993) versus American culture that socializes boys and men to value aggression, anger, control, and dominance (Herman, 1988). Sex, therefore, comes to be a violent expression of male dominance over women, which in turn, perpetuates rape culture.

Brownmiller’s (1975) observation in her book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, captures the reality that men have long used the human body to establish a social and legal hierarchy. Men use their ‘strong’ bodies to dominate women’s ‘weak’

bodies through fear and power. Patriarchal dominance is continued through men suppression of women's sexuality with an emphasis on chastity, purity, and unyielding monogamy. In the past, to violate another man's property (his woman's body) was to directly violate the man. It is through his ownership of "property" that society came to recognize rape as a crime; not because a woman has autonomy over her body but because a man has autonomy over his woman, his property. Thus, rape had been constructed as a property crime committed by men against other men. This thinking was accepted because women's fear of being raped encouraged "protective mating" with men who could protect them from the violence of other men (Brownmiller, 1975).

Though integral to the feminist anti-rape movement of the 1970s, *Against Our Will* has not been without its critics. Much of the original critique came from feminist theorists of Color such as bell hooks and Angela Davis. During the second wave of feminism, there was significant push back regarding the exclusion of issues specific to women of Color and the implication of racism towards all people of Color, men and women, within the white feminist movement. Brownmiller's (1975) work received similar criticisms. First, her book focused on the rape of white women by Black men which effectively diminished the sociocultural impact of white men's rape of Black women. While Brownmiller acknowledges the historic victimization of Black (slave) women at the hands of white male masters, she does not fully address how that historic victimization translates into present day racism and sexism experienced by Black women. Specifically, bell hooks (1981) takes issue with Brownmiller's lack of attention to how the historical sexual victimization of Black women perpetuated racist and sexist stereotypes of Black women as loose whores, which still prevail today. Angela Davis

(1981) finds additional fault with Brownmiller's arguments, particularly her infatuation with the Black male rapist. First, Brownmiller's (1975) idea that male supremacy is beyond the reach of Black men is problematic. Presenting sexual violence and physical conquest of the female body as the only way to access male supremacy, fed into the myth of the insatiable Black rapist (Davis, 1981). Additionally, Davis (1981) argues that Black men as rapists coupled with Black women as whores effectively illustrates all Black people as hypersexual animals. Furthermore, this ideology silences Black women's cries of rape from both white and Black men. Thus, while doing significantly important work for rape literature and the overall anti-rape feminist movement, Brownmiller (1975) proves to be unsatisfying for Black people and contributes to the erasure of Black women's experiences with compounded sexism and racism.

Transfer of Power: Female Sex Offenders

Women who commit sex-based offenses violate the schema of 'womaness' or femininity (Saradijan, 2010; Walker, 1997). The social schemas of maleness and femaleness situate men and women into roles that are inherently opposite. There is an understanding that men are not meant to be nurturers; instead they should be catered and yielded to physically and sexually. For women, the inverse is true. Women should be nurturing and caring regardless of personal sacrifice (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Walker, 1997). Additionally, women are expected to suppress their sexuality and exist solely to be objectified by men. Therefore, departure from these schemas is usually stigmatized, minimized, or dismissed. Thus, the perpetuation of gender expectations likely supports an unwillingness to address the predatory nature of women who engage in sex crimes. This by-stander attitude of society at large may explain a similar nonchalant approach from

practitioners and academics regarding sexual offending committed by women. Specifically, it may contribute to the sparse literature on female sex offenders as well as the detectability of sex offenses committed by women. The sparsity of female sex offender research is emphasized by the general absence of research regarding female sex offenders of Color. The existing research, however, attests to the statistical rarity of female sex offenders, broadly, and female sex offenders of Color, specifically.

Prevalence of female sex offending

Sex offenders are statistically rare. Female sex offenders are even rarer. Therefore, the sex offender literature, like most criminological research, is largely male-centered. Women make up less than ten percent of sex offense arrests (US Department of Justice, 2002; Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2006). Even then, those women committing sex offenses may not necessarily be required to register as sex offenders regardless of the majority being sex offenses against minors (Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Tewksbury, 2004). In addition to being under-reported and considered less serious (Hetherington, 1999), female sex offending is quite rare and has been scantily studied. In fact, the first articles on the subject were not published until the 1980s (Tewksbury, 2004). Society struggles to believe that women are sexual beings let alone aggressive, moreover, mothers and nurturers are presumed most unlikely capable of sexually abusing children (Denov, 2004). The current knowledge on female sex offenders has largely focused on comparing them to their male counterparts (Embry & Lyons, 2012), assessing various risk factors for recidivism (Sandler & Freeman, 2009), establishing typologies that explain female sex offender behaviors and relationships (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Sandler & Freeman, 2007; Wijkam, Bijleveld, & Hendricks, 2010), and understanding

the role of women's victimization in their sexual offending (Pallet, 1987). Yet, with all of the literature attempting to explain female sex offending, very little has focused on race specific factors.

Highly publicized cases of female teachers having inappropriate relationships with their male students have shed a critical light on these women over the last decade; though, the prominent image of a sex offender remains to be one of an older middle-aged white man preying on underage girls. The Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM) reports that of adult arrests, women only account for one percent of forcible rape arrests and six percent for all other sex offenses. Among juvenile sex offender arrests, girls account for three percent of forcible rape arrests and five percent of other violent sex offenses (CSOM, 2007).⁶ A meta-analysis of sex offenses across twelve countries finds that female offenders account for approximately 2% of all sex offenses that are reported to police and 12% of sexual offenses reported in victimization surveys (Cortini, Babchishin, & Rat, 2017). Though, consistent with CSOM (2007) reports and prior prevalence research (Cortini & Hanson, 2005), data suggests that female offenders in the United States account for 7% of sexual offenses, a proportion that drops to about 1.3% when sexual offenses only include forcible rape (Cortini et al., 2017).

The rarity of female sex offending is often questioned in two ways: do the data reflect an actual under-occurrence of women committing sex offenses? Or, is the phenomenon under-recognized and/or under-reported? Most research suggests that the latter is more likely (CSOM, 2007; Denov, 2004). As is usually the case with sexual

⁶ While this project focuses on adult female sex offenders, it is relevant to acknowledge the prevalence of adult versus juvenile sex offending. Specifically, it is important to note that sex offense arrests for adult women have decreased while juvenile courts have seen an increase in girls coming before them for sex offenses.

abuse, those committed by women also go largely under reported. Researchers attribute this low reporting to the nature of women's participation in caregiving roles (Berner, Briken, & Hill, 2009; CSOM, 2007; Vandiver & Walker, 2002). That is, women's sexual offending behavior can be more easily hidden within traditional caregiving activities such as bathing and dressing children.

The general public is unwilling to consider a woman being sexually abusive. Even after the first articles examining female sex offenders were published, many segments of society were reluctant to acknowledge the significance of this behavior (Tewksbury, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002). Such reluctance is attributed to socially prescribed gender norms of what is expected and acceptable of women and men (Denov, 2004). Traditional sexual scripts dictate socially acceptable behaviors for boys/men and girls/women. Sexual scripts theory "emphasizes the relevance of culturally defined expectations for women and men's appropriate sexual behaviors" (Sahl & Keene, 2010, p. 1); and female sex offenders violate those expectations. Sexual scripts are interwoven with social mores about "sexuality and reflect consensually shared gender stereotypes and gender-typed behavioral expectations" (Krahe, Bieneck, & Scheinberger-Olwig, 2007, p. 316). In other words, a woman as a sexual predator runs contrary to established social standards and people are uncomfortable, unwilling, or unable to address such a contradiction. Consider that from a young age and throughout adulthood, girls are socialized to suppress, if not completely reject, their sexuality. Throughout adolescence, purity and the preservation of virginity are emphasized (Hayes & Carpenter, 2013). Then, as wives, women are groomed to be passive docile extensions of their husbands and sexuality is linked exclusively to the man's inherent and uncontrollable sexual desires.

On the other hand, boys are socialized to be just the opposite. For young men, sexual exploration is encouraged in the name of gaining experience and establishing masculinity. (Britton, 2011; Brownmiller, 1975; Hayes & Carpenter, 2013; Walker, 1997).

The public constructs sex offenders as aggressive predators who are on a constant quest for “satisfaction, power, and pleasure” (Sahl & Keene, 2010, p. 266). Women as abusers or sexual predators, however, do not fit these scripts. Sexual scripts theory posits that these traits are in conflict with the appropriate scripts assigned to women and girls as feminine beings (Sahl & Keene, 2010; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Typologies of female sex offenders may pose explanations that reconcile sexual offending committed by women with traditional sex scripts.

Identifying the female sex offender: Proposed typologies

The “typical” female sex offender is a white woman in her early 30s and her victim is usually a relative or acquaintance. She is also likely to abuse drugs and/or alcohol and have a life marked by victimization of her own. The victim may be male or female and typically average in age around twelve years old (Sandler & Freeman, 2007; Tewksbury, 2004; Vandiver & Kercher, 2002; 2004). These characteristics, while important to the demographic classification of these women, do not address the categories female sex offenders may fall into. Specifically, demographic designators do not identify the nature of the relationships these women may have with their victims or how they come to view their own offending.

Work remains to be done on best practices for categorizing female sex offenders. Broadly, female sex offender scholars aim to distinguish the ‘previously victimized

broken woman' from the 'monstrous perverted woman,' a specific form of the mad/bad dichotomy (see Bontrager et al., 2013). The significance of this distinction is two-fold; first, to develop sex offender treatment programs and second, for understanding the larger phenomenon of female sexual offending. In theoretical comparisons of men/boys and women/girls, there is an assumption of socialization differences between the genders that influence social navigation, particularly criminal offending and victimization (Creek & Dunn, 2011; Isom Scott & Mikell, 2018). Sexual offending is no different. Researchers of female sex offenders have argued for the development of typologies and theories specific to this demographic simply because female and male sex offenders are different in their offending patterns and behaviors. While there is no one-size-fits-all typology for male or female sex offenders, there are characteristics that seem to be common across these literatures.

Sarrel and Masters (1982), the first to take on this task, propose four distinct typologies based on eleven cases of male victims of female sexual abusers. The categories include forced assault, babysitter abuse, incestuous abuse, and dominant woman abuse. Then, in a separate study, Wolfe (1985) utilizes data from twelve female sex abuse perpetrators to develop four typologies of female sex offenders; psychopathic, neurotic, over-controlled, and normal criminal.

Mathews, Matthews, and Speltz (1989), one of the most widely cited works in the female sex offender literature, utilize a sample of sixteen women in a correctional facility to establish five typologies: 1) teacher-lover who sees the relationship as consensual and romantic, 2) the predisposed molester who is usually a victim of sexual abuse herself, 3) the male-coerced molester who is generally docile and in an abusive heterosexual

relationship and usually abuses her own children, 4) experimenter/exploiter is a younger woman or adolescent who abuses a younger male, and 5) the psychologically disturbed female sex offender will display psychotic or neurotic behaviors. Mathews and colleagues (1989) draw particular attention to the psyche in the role of women's sexual offending. Their typologies focus on the way women rationalize, justify, or make sense of the relationship they had with their victims.

Through combining earlier typologies, Mayer (1992) identifies additional categories of female sex offenders including: the female rapist, female sexual harasser, mother molester, triads, and homosexual offender. Lawson (1993) focuses on women who were "mother molesters" (see Mayer, 1992) and categorizes their behavior into four distinct types: subtle abuse, seductive abuse, humiliation, and overt sexual abuse. Later, as suggested additions to Mathews et al. (1989) work, Syed and Williams (1996) pose three categories based on nineteen Canadian female sex offenders: angry-impulsive, male-accompanied familial, and male-accompanied non-familial. The contributions of Lawson (1993) and Syed and Williams (1996) pay specific attention to women's offending in relation to others. Lawson's (1993) specific focus on mothers sheds light on how mothers exploit their own children, while Syed and Williams (1996) emphasize women's vulnerability to coercion by male intimate partners to engage in the victimization of others.

Vandiver and Kercher (2004) review previous attempts at female sex offender typologies in their own efforts to improve upon the literature. While useful in the exploration of female sex offender research, many previous studies use samples of less than twenty women. However, Vandiver and Kercher (2004) utilize all adult female sex

offenders registered in Texas for a sample size of 471 women. Thus, this study is one of the most complete and comprehensive studies on female sex offenders' typologies since Mathews et al. (1989). From their assessment, Vandiver and Kercher (2004) propose six typologies for female sex offenders. First, heterosexual nurtures emerge as the largest group with characteristics comparable to Mathews et al. (1989) teacher-lover group who view the relationship as non-abusive, though Vandiver and Kercher's group include other caretaking roles besides teacher. Second, the noncriminal homosexual offender, the second largest group, victimizes mostly girls. This group seldom has any arrests after the initial offense and low numbers of overall arrests. Female sexual predators, the third category, are most like non-sexually offending female criminals in that the sexual offending is part of her overall criminality. This group likely has high numbers of offenses and arrests after the initial sexual offense for offenses such as shoplifting or property crimes. Young adult child exploiters, the fourth category, include young offenders with very young victims, possibly mothers victimizing their own children or those in babysitting roles. These women are most likely to commit sexual assault. The fifth group, homosexual criminals, engages in crimes mostly for economic benefit (i.e., compelling prostitution aka "the pimp"). Like the female sexual predator, the homosexual criminal's offending is part of her overall deviant behavior. The last and smallest group includes the oldest offenders, aggressive homosexual offenders. These women victimize other women and the average age of their victims is thirty-one years old. Thus, this group may be an outlier in the examination of female sex offenders (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). As a group of offenders who victimize adults, most of the theories developed to

understand female sex offenders will likely not apply. However, this group is not without the need for further exploration.

Vandiver (2006) address a well-established but largely ignored aspect of female sex offenders, the difference between women who act alone and those who act with a co-offender. This distinction is significant considering that much of the typology literature includes some version of a woman engaging in the abuse with a male partner, usually a romantic partner such as a boyfriend or husband (Syed & Williams, 1996; Lewis & Stanley, 2000). Studies on female sex offenders find a range of cases involving a co-offender. For example, one study shows that twenty-two percent of offenders in their sample involve a co-offender (Rowan, Rowan, & Langelier, 1990), while another finds that ninety-six percent of female sex offenders act with a co-offender (Faller, 1988), still others report significantly different rates (Syed & Williams, 1996; Lewis & Stanley, 2000; Denov, 2003; Vandiver, 2003). The salience of prior victimization among female sex offenders coupled with a history of intimate partner abuse leads researchers to conclude that women in co-offending situations are likely coerced into participating in the victimization of a vulnerable other (Vandiver, 2006).

In her study of co-offending female sex offenders, Vandiver (2006) finds that co-offenders' abusive behaviors are more likely to be discovered by law enforcement, whereas among offenders acting alone the offending is more likely to go unnoticed. This finding is attributed to offenders' propensity towards engaging in general criminal activity. At the time of arrest co-offenders are more likely to be arrested for a non-sexual offense in addition to the sexual offense, when compared to solo female sex offenders (Vandiver, 2006). Co-offenders are also more likely to have a female victim. While the

research is unsettled on preferences for male or female children among solo offenders, those who participate in the abuse with a male co-offender are more likely to victimize girls (Wijkam, Bijleveld, & Hendricks, 2010). This difference may be attributed to multiple factors. Among them, male sex offenders are more predatory and prefer female victims. Moreover, this dynamic highlights the likelihood that women who co-offend are in abusive, coercive relationships with their male accomplice (Vandiver, 2006; Wijkam et al., 2010).

Co-offending sex offender research has identified a group of women who have male accomplices but are not coerced into the abuse. These women, classified as rejected/vengeful, tend to be motivated by rejection from adult men (Nathan & Ward, 2002). This is particularly interesting because it conflicts with the narrative that co-offending women are themselves being victimized and are being forced to participate in the abuse. Nonetheless, the extant literature has shown greater support for the male-coerced female sex offender particularly given the correlation between offending behaviors and the offenders' experiences of victimization (Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991). Table 2.1 summarizes literature on proposed typologies for female sex offenders, including the suggested identifications posed by each study.

These typologies reveal a number of connections among female sex offenders such as histories marked by prior victimization, mental illness, and substance abuse. However, none of the typologies addresses the sociocultural influences that may play a role in women's pathways into sexual offending, nor are there sociocultural considerations for how women may come to understand or rationalize their own behavior. An intersectionality focused approach to studying female sex offenders is

necessary to fully understand the interwoven social identities that influence dynamics between the victims and offenders of sexual abuse. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that while these typologies capture what is “usual” or “average” within specific groups of female sex offenders, not every woman within the individual groups will have the same traits nor are all groups mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, significant work remains to be done with regards to advancing our understanding of sex offenses committed by women, especially women of Color who often escape the attention of criminological research.

Beyond the proposed typologies, though, some of the research on female sex offenders utilizes a cognitive approach for understanding the motivations of female sex offenders. Beech and colleagues (2009) apply Ward and Keenan’s (1999) implicit theories originally used to describe male sex offenders, to female sex offenders.

Table 2.1 Summary of Typologies

Author (Year)	Typologies
Sarrel & Masters (1982)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forced assault • Babysitter abuse • Incestuous abuse • Dominant woman abuse
Wolfe (1985)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychopathic • Neurotic • Over-Controlled • Normal criminal
Mathews, Matthews, & Speltz (1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-Lover • Predisposed molester • Male-Coerced molester • Experimenter/Exploiter • Psychologically disturbed
Mayer (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female rapist • Female sexual harasser • Mother molester • Triads • Homosexual offender

Lawson (1993) – extended Mayer’s “mother molester”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Subtle abuse · Seductive abuse · Humiliation · Overt sexual abuse
Syed & Williams (1996) – extended Mathews et al.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Angry-impulsive · Male-accompanied familial · Male-accompanied non-familial
Nathan & Ward (2002) – differentiated between male-accompanied and male-coerced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The rejected/revengeful · Male-coerced
Vandiver & Kercher (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Heterosexual nurtures · Noncriminal homosexual offender · Female sexual predators · Young adult child exploiters · Homosexual criminals · Aggressive homosexual offenders

Implicit theories, or schemas, are cognitive processes used to make sense of life experiences (Beech, Parret, Ward, & Fisher, 2009). In their study of male perpetrators of child sex offenses, Ward and Keenan (1999) identify five implicit theories (ITs): 1) children as sexual objects which centers upon the belief that children want sex and enjoy it, 2) entitlement maintains that some people (adults) are superior to others (children) and the superior has the right to have their needs satisfied, 3) dangerous world centers on the belief that the world is inherently malicious and therefore, preemptive attacks on others or submission to others is necessary, 4) uncontrollability suggests that most things cannot be controlled and things just happen to people, and 5) nature of harm centers on the notion that harm exists on a spectrum and some sex acts do not actually cause harm but are, in fact, beneficial (Ward & Keenan, 1999; Beech et al., 2009, p. 203). Beech et al. (2009) explores the presence of these ITs in female sex offenders to determine if women’s cognitive processes are like those seen in male sex offenders. Among the

women in their study, there was no support found for the entitlement IT but the uncontrollability IT was most common. This finding, again, highlights the need for expanded research on female sex offenders and theoretical explanations that acknowledge the social positions of women.

Although not explicitly a typology of female sex offenders, it is worth noting that the overall criminal offending behaviors of these women may lend themselves to how women's sexual offending manifests. Sex offenders, generally, tend to be specialists in their offending patterns compared to non-sex offenders (Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendricks, 2011). If/when they re-offend it is often a sexual offense (Wijkman et al., 2011). Female sex offenders have also been found to be specialists in terms of crimes they commit compared to male sex offenders, who on the whole, specialize in crimes more so than male non-sex offenders. Furthermore, the type of sex offense is largely connected to whether or not the sex offender is a specialist or a generalist. For example, child abusers are more likely to be specialists than those who sexually victimize adults (Wijkam et al., 2011). It is this nuanced examination of female sex offenders' behaviors and patterns that may reveal clearer understandings of these women's pathways to offending, particularly the importance of traumatic life experiences.

Female sex offenders: Victimizers or victims?

One of the most robust findings in criminological research is the connection between offending and victimization; those who offend have usually been a victim of crime at some point in their lives (Lauritsen et al., 1991; Pauwels & Svensson, 2011; Smith & Ecob, 2007). Within the feminist criminology literature, female victimization, specifically physical or sexual victimization, has been consistently established as a

significant contributor to girls' and women's pathways into criminal activity (Arnold, 1995; Chesney-Lind, 2005; Isom Scott, 2018). This finding is supported in the general criminology literature which states that individuals who offend usually have a prior history of victimization (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Daly, 1992; Miller & Mullins, 2006). Sexual offending follows similar trends. Of the studies conducted on female sex offenders, though not necessarily generalizable due to small sample sizes, prior victimization has been found to be a common denominator for many of the women, for both adult and juvenile offenders (Vandiver, 2006; Berner et al., 2009). Importantly, female sex offenders are more likely than their male counterparts to experience physical and sexual abuse from parents (Allen, 1991; Freeman & Sandler, 2008). However, the sex offender literature, in general, points to a significant relationship between childhood victimization and adult sexual offending (Jespersen, Lalumiere, & Seto, 2009).

The cycle of sexual abuse is prominent across studies examining both male and female sex offenders, adult or juveniles. For female sex offenders, research studies have consistently found higher rates of sexual victimization compared to male sex offenders and female non-sex offenders (Allen, 1991; Grayston & DeLuca, 1999; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Nathan & Ward, 2002). Allen (1991) also reports that female sex offenders are more likely to have experienced physical abuse. Similar findings have been uncovered among adolescent female sex offenders (Matthews, Hunter, & Vuz, 1997). Graham (1996) argues that abusing others is a learned coping mechanism for those who were abused as children. Other studies have examined whether it is physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, or neglect as a child that has the greatest influence on whether an adult becomes an abuser (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009). One study finds that neglect,

physical and sexual abuses increase the likelihood of future arrest as an adult for sex crimes (Widom & Ames, 1994). Elliott, Eldridge, Ashfield, and Beech (2010) show that 51 percent of female sex offenders experienced neglect or parental rejection in their childhood and 42 percent had been a victim of sexual abuse during childhood. Meta-analyses of sex offender literature have also report that sex offenders are substantially more likely to have been physically and sexually abused than their non-sex offender counterparts. More so, women who offend against children are likely to have been childhood sex abuse victims versus those who offend against adults (Jespersen et al., 2009; Seto & Lalumière, 2010).

Elliott et al. (2010) suggests that among female sex offenders who victimized children younger than twelve years old, offending behavior may be a reflection of their own experiences with abuse. These women may not have fully acknowledged their victimization and see sexual contact with children as a normal dynamic of child-adult interactions. On the other hand, women who victimize children older than twelve may inappropriately see their victims as more mature than they actually are. Therefore, the victim is not seen as a child but, instead, an acceptable and willing receiver of the sexual offers (Elliott et al., 2010). However, for women who co-offended with a man, the victimization dynamic is slightly different depending on the relationship between the male and female offender. Specifically, the difference lies in whether co-offending relationship constitutes a 'male-coerced' or 'male-accompanied' relationship (Nathan & Ward, 2002; Syed & Williams, 1996).

For male-coerced co-offending relationships, women tend to be overly dependent on men and display an overt lack of empathy (Elliot et al., 2010). The lack of empathy

may be the driving force behind their participation in sexual victimization. The authors argue, that to empathize with a victim may force these women to come to terms with their own victimization. Doing so runs afoul of their rationalization that the male partner's sexual gratification is superior to not only the child's needs but her own needs, as well (Elliot et al., 2010). For women in male-accompanied partnerships, Elliott and colleagues (2010) also find that these women have significant age gaps between themselves and their male intimate partner. This age difference creates a power imbalance that these women attempt to correct by victimizing children. Experiences of long-standing powerlessness place these women in a vulnerable position which they perceive can only be rectified through victimization of an even more powerless person. These observations are supported in contemporary feminist criminology literature which attributes female offending to inequality and oppression within a patriarchal society (Chesney-Lind, 1986; 2006).

Further support for the role of victimization in women's sexual offending is found in Beech, Parret, Ward, and Fisher's (2009) application of implicit theories (ITs) to female sex offenders. As previously stated, while there is no support for the entitlement IT, the presence of the other ITs largely reflect women's victimization. The most prevalent IT, uncontrollability, reveals that women in the study often feel too weak to prevent the abuse and express inadequacies in interpersonal relationships and parenting abilities. Furthermore, women who maintain the uncontrollability IT express feelings of powerlessness controlling their lives. Thus, they yield to demands of others, such as abusive romantic partners, who are often co-offenders. For the women who possess the dangerous world IT, victimization seems inevitable. Specifically, they fear that they will

be victimized by their intimate partner (and co-offender) if they do not participate in the victimization of the child. Nature of harm IT for women supports their desires to protect the victim from additional or harsher victimization from the co-offender (Beech et al., 2009). This may also be a reflection of the woman's own fears of victimization from the male co-offender.

Lastly, Beech and colleagues (2009) report evidence of two additional schemas that may indicate the role of victimization in sexual offending. First, subjugation suggests that the women submit to abusive co-offenders out of fear, to avoid being abandoned or retaliated against, similar to women falling into the rejected/revengeful typology (Nathan & Ward, 2002). Second, the authors discuss self-sacrifice referring to women who meet the needs of their abusive partner while ignoring their own needs. The manifestation of both subjugation and self-sacrifice is present in female sex offenders who feel coerced to either participate in the victimization or suffer the aggression of their co-offender (Beech et al., 2009). In sum, victimization by female sex offenders is often a product of cognitions to reconcile their own abuse from intimate partners. Beyond typologies, theories of female sexual offending are sensitive to the influence of previous trauma from intimate partners as well as trauma from childhood abuse.

A theoretical approach to female sex offending

Theories of female sex offenders are mostly feminized versions of criminological theories designed to explain male sex offenders. Ward and Hudson (1998) proposed three levels of theoretical perspectives to explain male sexual offending: Level I, Level II, and Level III. Multifactorial, or Level I, theories are comprehensive explanations of sex offending. For example, the integrated theory of (male) sexual offending proposed by

Marshall and Barbaree (1990) incorporates developmental theories with those that propose the influence of situational elements. For female sex offenders, Harris (2010) proposes a Level I theory with focus on women's experiences of patriarchy and victimization, concepts popular in contemporary feminist criminology research. Similarly, Level II theories of sexual offending point to a single specific factor that has a particularly strong impact on sex offending behavior. In male sex offenders, this factor was usually some sort of "empathy deficit or deviant sexual arousal" (Gannon & Cortoni, 2010, p. 38; Harris, 2010). For female sex offenders, those single factors generally boil down to victimization during childhood (Freeman & Sandler, 2008), coercion by a co-offender (Vandiver, 2006), and/or cognitive distortions (Beech et al., 2009).

Feminist criminological theories have long argued patriarchy and victimization as independent factors leading to women's offending (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). A theory that emphasizes powerlessness as a by-product of both patriarchy and victimization, however, has not yet been fully developed within mainstream feminist criminology. Proposed "theories of powerlessness" would need to incorporate elements of women's structural powerlessness from their attachment to home responsibilities. For example, feeling trapped and powerless within the home may lead women to abuse their children as a way to reclaim some of their power (Elliot et al., 2010). Additionally, experiences with victimization and the policing of girls' bodies and sexuality during childhood contribute to women feeling that they have little to no power over their bodies. This powerlessness may lead to the sexual abuse of children to

establish power within an otherwise powerless identity (Harris, 2010).⁷ Level I and II theories have the strongest influence on typologies that focus on the female abuser's experiences with victimization such as the predisposed molester and the male-coerced molester (Mathews et al., 1989) and mother molesters (Mayer, 1992). Level III theories, or micro-level theories, attempt to understand how offenses come to occur, specifically, the process leading up to the behavior. These theories are usually developed inductively through a recollection of events and factors connected to the crime (Harris, 2010). The most widely recognized micro-level theory of female sex offending is Gannon, Rose, and Ward's (2008) descriptive model of female sexual offending. Gannon and colleagues' (2008) theory is composed of three phases: background factors, pre-offense period, and offense period. Background factors prepare offenders to engage in the sexual offending. The pre-offense period examines the year before and right until the offense is committed. Finally, the offense period focuses on the sexual offense itself and the time immediately after its commission (Gannon et al., 2008). Broadly, the descriptive model constructs a timeline of events and their influence leading up to the sexual offense. As the most comprehensive theoretical approach to female sex offenders, a brief synopsis of the descriptive model is necessary to further the discussion of female sex offender research.

The background phase of the descriptive model is similar to other explanations of female pathways to sexual offending, specifically those that attribute the behavior to childhood experiences of trauma and abuse (Graham, 1996; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009). The background factors in Gannon et al.'s (2008) descriptive model theory are categorized into five dimensions: 1) early family environment, 2) abusive experiences, 3)

⁷ For adolescent female sexual offenders, this abuse may be enacted upon younger siblings or non-familial youth (such as a teenager who babysits).

lifestyle outcomes, 4) vulnerability factors, and 5) major life stressors. Early family environment focuses on factors within the woman's childhood that are either mostly negative or mostly positive. Abusive experience can refer to directly experienced abuse (such as physical or sexual abuse) or abuse felt vicariously (such as witnessing domestic violence). Lifestyle outcomes are the prosocial or antisocial coping mechanisms employed by women, from adolescence into early adulthood, as a response to various experiences. Vulnerability factors include the presence or absence of appropriate coping skills, social support, or mental illnesses. Lastly, major life stressors manifest in female sex offenders from childhood experiences with domestic violence (Allen, 1991; Gannon et al., 2008).

The second phase of the descriptive model of female sexual offending, the pre-offense period, provides an explanation as to how the Phase I variables factor into the lifestyles of the women and subsequently contribute to the increased likelihood of offending. This phase focuses on how the background factors affect a woman's propensity to sexually offend and how her lifestyle creates opportunity to offend (Harris, 2010). This is the "preparation" phase of the theory that applies to the twelve months immediately prior to the crime. Generally, this phase incorporates the goals and plans of the offending behaviors. The goals usually fall into one of three motivations: sexual gratification or pleasure, intimacy with the victim (or co-offender), or some "instrumental other" such as financial gain, revenge, or humiliation (Gannon et al., 2008, p. 16). The final phase of the descriptive model of female sexual offending is the offense and post-offense period. This focuses specifically on how the offenders initiated the sexual offense and examines victim responses and offender consequences to the crime after the offense

is committed (Gannon et al., 2008). The final two phases of the model are most likely to reveal the appropriate typologies for the sex offender behavior because it is here that the grooming patterns and motivations are most evident.⁸ As such, understanding the correlations and influences of all three phases of the descriptive model, along with other theoretical approaches, provides a way to understand the risks of offending, recidivism, and violence among female sex offenders. Table 2.2 summarizes contemporary theoretical approaches to explaining female sex offending. Then, Table 2.3 displays a condensed view of Gannon and colleagues' (2008) proposed descriptive model of female sex offending.

Table 2.2 Theories of Female Sex Offending

Theoretical Perspective	Overall Concept	Example
Level 1 (multifactorial)	Comprehensive explanations of sex offending	compounded experiences with patriarchy and victimization (i.e. powerlessness)
Level 2	Single specific factor	childhood victimization; coercion by a co-offender; cognitive distortions
Level 3 (micro-level)	How offenses come to occur; process leading up to the event	descriptive model of female sex offending

Table 2.3 Phases of Descriptive Model of Female Sex Offending

Background Phase – Pathways to Offending	Pre-Offense Period – Preparation and Goals	Offense and Post - Offense Period
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early family environment • Abusive experiences • Lifestyle outcomes • Vulnerability factors • Major life stressors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual gratification • Intimacy with victim or co-offender • Instrumental other (i.e. financial gain, revenge) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiation of sexual offense • Victim response • Offender consequences

⁸ Grooming patterns refer to “patterned behavior designed to increase opportunities for sexual assault, minimize victim resistance or withdrawal, and reduce disclosure or belief” (Tanner & Brake, 2013, p. 1).

The theoretical explanations of female sex offending are important to this study as yet another illustration to the lack of attention paid to various identities of women. Present theories do not provide explanations as to why all women who have been victimized do not go on to engage in crime. While there are general theories that may explain why most people do not commit crime (see Gottfredson & Hirsch, 1990; Hirschi, 1969) sex crimes are a unique type of criminal behavior that is almost exclusively connected to the offenders' own victimization and trauma (Jespersen et al., 2009; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009). There may be other factors, specific to sexual offending and victimization that insulate sexual assault survivors from continuing the cycle of abuse. Additionally, much of the existing theoretical arguments attempt to explain how women come to victimize others, mostly as a consequence of previous victimization or trauma. However, the theories currently in place do not acknowledge racial, ethnic, or cultural differences that may influence women's victimization experience and how that experience translates into offending. For example, women of Color experience higher rates of sexual victimization than white women (BJS, 2016). Yet, women of Color constitute a small number of sexual offenders. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) 99% of sex offenders are male and 60% of male or female sex offenders are white (RAINN, 2017). This reveals a notable gap in the broader female sex offender literature, particularly regarding women of Color who do commit sex crimes, and is a testament to the need for expanding this body of research.

Intersectionality: Bringing Women of Color to the Forefront

The role of race in criminological theory and legal discourse cannot be separated from the role of gender when discussing the experiences and portrayals of Black women or other women of Color (WOC). While the gender expectations of women have already been presented, this project has yet to fully address how the influence of those roles differentially affects women who are not white and middle-class. The positionality of Black women and WOC cannot be dichotomized into woman or person of Color categories. Thus, it is important to consider the way racial-ethnic identity and gender collectively shape the lives of WOC. Intersectionality as an analytical tool informs our understanding of “the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2) particularly as that complexity applies to social inequalities experienced by women who occupy multiple marginalized identities.

Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman” speech at the 1851 Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, largely spearheaded the need for multiple identity inclusion within abolitionist and early feminist movements. In the shadow of slavery abolition activism and the fight for women’s suffrage, Black women have historically secured a spot on the sidelines, forgotten in the struggle for equality. Though, the population has grown and diversified over the years, it is important to note that while much of the intersectionality literature focuses on the experiences of Black women, Black women do not have a monopoly on the core concepts of intersectionality. In fact, relating to the genesis of social movements involving women of Color, Black women have always been part of a “heterogeneous alliance” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 71) with Asian-American, Chicana/Latina, and Indigenous/Native American women.

Intersectionality's key concepts can be traced to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Collins & Bilge, 2016) during which time social movements such as Black Power, Asian-American Movement, Red Power, Chicano Liberation, and Civil Rights managed to simultaneously include and exclude the women of these movements. First, within the organizations driving these movements towards equality, women were still subordinated to men within their respective racial and ethnicity groups. Frances Beal published an essay in opposition to the Black Power movement's patriarchy and its role in the continued oppression of Black women. Beal (1995[1970]) argued that Black women, at the time, remain to be excluded from white feminist activism. Women of Color also existed on the periphery of the second-wave white feminist movement of the same time period (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Roth, 2004; Springer, 2005). Intersectionality is not only about the various identities people may occupy. Instead, it is about the consequences of those social identities (MacKinnon, 2013). In most cases, those consequences manifest in myriad forms of marginalization and oppression. The 1976 case of DeGraffenreid v. General Motors illustrates the experiences of many Black women, and other WOC, who struggle to have the rest of society acknowledge their multiple identities and multiple sources of oppression.⁹

Kimberlé Crenshaw first introduced the term 'intersectionality' in her work, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women*

⁹ This case argued that General Motors' "last hired-first fired" seniority policy perpetuated racism and sexism in that many of the employees affected were Black women. Emma DeGraffenreid and four others sued GM for discrimination. The courts determined that the women could not bring allegations based on both sex-based and race-based discrimination because that would be a "super-remedy" beyond the scope of the Title VII protections of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, regardless of the women existing at the intersection of two protected populations.

of Color (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1991) uses experiences of domestic violence and rape to emphasize the need for intersectional identity politics within feminist movements. Feminist efforts have often been led by white middle-class women and generally exclude working class women and women of Color. However, within the context of violence experienced by women, Crenshaw (1991) argues that those experiences are influenced by other social identities, particularly race and class. Therefore, when feminist and antiracist groups act on their respective causes, they need to acknowledge intragroup differences and the experiences of people who identify with more than one oppressed and marginalized group (i.e., women of Color).

While the coining of the term may be attributed to Crenshaw (1991), in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, organizations such as the Combahee River Collective, the Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent, and the Third World Women Alliance had based their missions on the notions that women of Color experience double (Beal, 1995 [1970]), triple (Lindsay, 1979), even multiple (King, 1988) jeopardy as a result of their social position. These revolutionary organizations argued that experiences with racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, and classism within a capitalist society form a “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2000) in which systems of oppression are interlocking; and their simultaneous effects on women of Color have been ignored in larger feminist and antiracist social movements. Though the work of intersectionality was being done some thirty years earlier, prior to the early 1990s, scholars had not fully considered the multiple identities of women of Color and the intersecting sources of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1989; 1991) posits that the experiences of WOC, specifically Black women, cannot be understood within the boundaries of racial or

gender discrimination. Black women's lives happen at the intersection of racism not experienced by white women and sexism not experienced by Black men. So, while most intersectional feminism scholars credit Crenshaw with coining the term 'intersectionality,' it was the success of calls for equality during the 1960s and 70s that led to the 1980s and 90s inclusion of women of Color within the institutions that previously excluded them. It was during this time that women of Color incorporated the need for identity politics and acknowledgment of multiple sources of oppression into academia. This incorporation meant that Black, Chicana, Indigenous, Asian, and other feminisms would place social justice at the forefront of their contribution to the academy, whereas those same social justice priorities were ignored in political social movements (Collins & Blige, 2016).

Controlling images: Black women

Women of Color, especially Black women, have long existed in what Melissa Harris-Perry (2011) refers to as standing in a crooked room. This placement of Black women refers to the weight of racial and gender stereotypes that affect the way these women must bend and adapt within distorted assumptions about their identity. Standing in the crooked room highlights why Black women's behaviors seem to accommodate demeaning stereotypes of Black womanhood (Harris-Perry, 2011). Gilkes (1983) argues, "Black women's assertiveness and their use of every expression of racism to launch multiple assaults against the entire fabric of inequality have been a consistent, multifaceted threat to the status quo; as punishment, Black women have been assaulted with a variety of negative images" (p. 294). The prevailing stereotypes of Black women permeate all forms of media from music and film to news and advertising and have

remained relatively consistent across time since slavery (Littlefield, 2008). Additionally, these controlling images place Black women in the margins of society as the ‘other’ by normalizing social injustices such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism.¹⁰

Social order survives by relegating Black women to the outside and “clarifying society’s boundaries” (Collins, 2000, p. 77). By ensuring that stereotypes prevail and keep Black women in a position of not belonging, there is an inherent emphasis on the significance of belonging (Collins, 2000). Through exclusion, Black women have come to be classified according to racist and sexist stereotypes: the asexual and longsuffering Mammy, the angry Black Sapphire (also known as the matriarch), the Reagan-era welfare queen, and the hypersexual Jezebel have been the standing tropes of African American womanhood (Bailey, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011; Littlefield, 2008). By portraying Black women in this light, oppression is a justified norm within a white hetero-patriarchal society (Collins, 2000).

The Mammy

The mammy is the ideal Black woman in the white mind. She is the face that whites, especially elite whites, expect Black woman to assume (Collins, 2000). The visual of the mammy is one that is well-etched in the white consciousness. She is an asexual, jolly, dark skinned, overweight, and maternal faithful domestic servant (Collins, 2000; Huey & Lynch, 1996; Harris-Perry, 2011; West, 1995). Mammy is the yardstick by which all other Black women are measured because she “knows her place,” accepts subordination, and cares for her white family better than her own family (Collins, 2000).

¹⁰ Controlling images are defined as “stereotypical and degrading images that operate to exploit and justify ‘defective’ characteristics of a particularly group such as cultural inferiority” (Norris & Billings, 2017, p. 80; see also Collins, 2000; 2004).

The mammy is a representation of the ideal version of Black womanhood. Her role in the white family supported the ideology of white supremacist misogyny by displaying the Black woman, not as a slave but a content and loyal servant (Harris-Perry, 2011).

The Matriarch

Where the mammy reigns supreme as the epitome of Black woman- and motherhood, the matriarch is the opposite. The matriarch, also known as the Sapphire, represents everything wrong in the Black community and within Black families (Huey & Lynch, 1996). The matriarch, the Sapphire, the so-called ‘Black bitch’ is an overbearing, strident, emasculating, loud, and aggressive portrayal of the Black woman (Austin, 1995; Collins, 2000; West, 1995). She is, essentially, a failed mammy. The Sapphire/matriarch is brash and independent (Harris-Perry, 2011; West, 1995). Her castrating ways drive men away and lead to absent fathers in the household, inadequate child supervision, and poverty, which leads to crime in Black communities (Collins, 2000; Huey & Lynch, 1996). The matriarch received considerable attention after Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan published his 1965 report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. In his report, Moynihan attributes “the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society to the deterioration of the Negro family” (Moynihan, 1965, p. 6). He points to Black women and mothers as the source of that deterioration. Moynihan argues that the divorce rate in Black communities had led to a large number of female-headed households. For him, dissolved marriages and absent fathers were at the heart of Black family disorganization and instability. Therefore, it was the Black women heading their households who were to blame for the ‘weakness’ within lower class Black communities.

The Welfare Mom

Moynihan (1965) also contributed to the trope of Black mothers being widely dependent on welfare assistance programs. In addition to his critique of Black women's role in the family breakdown, Moynihan (1965) argues that not only are one-fourth of Black children illegitimate, but the majority of Black children received public assistance. The breakdown of Black homes had led to an increase in welfare dependency among families with absent fathers (Moynihan, 1965). The welfare mom has a work ethic opposite of the hardworking matriarch and mammy and depicts the American consciousness's issue with Black women gaining access to government benefits they are entitled to but had been systematically denied (Collins, 2000). In other words, welfare mothers are viewed as lazy even though they are actually working mothers with legitimate rights to government assistance programs that systemically marginalize those most in need. The welfare mother, who later became the Reagan-era 'welfare queen,' is an image that showcases Black women who are content with "living off the system" of government assistance programs (Littlefield, 2008; Lubiano, 1992). She is an updated version of the breeder from slavery.

Whereas breeders were needed, and to some extent encouraged, to supply newborn Blacks who would later become profitable property, the welfare mom as a breeder costs the state an exorbitant amount of money (Collins, 2000). She is seen as a threat to the political and economic white supremacy. Like the matriarch, the welfare mom is a failed mammy. The welfare mom activates stereotypes about female sexuality and Black work ethic. Her innumerable children reflect her overactive sexuality. Furthermore, she is a bad mother who passes laziness and a poor work ethic on to her

children (Collins, 2000; Huey & Lynch, 1996). The welfare mom, and later the welfare queen, served to remind the public that working-class Black women are the consequence of the liberal social and political agenda. Ronald Reagan, in both his 1976 and 1980 presidential campaign used the visual of a Black welfare queen to illustrate flaws in social assistance programs, despite “welfare” being a term that captures multiple government programs. However, the term is most often used to refer to programs that help the poor, under the assumption that the majority of recipients are Black, specifically single, poor Black mothers with many children (Roberts, 1996).

The Jezebel

One of the more prevailing depictions of Black womanhood is that of the jezebel—the whore, the hoochie. This image has not only imprinted the minds of whites but has become a staple in Black pop culture. The image of the oversexed jezebel has been such a prominent part of America’s illustration of Black women, that the Black community has internalized the label and reclaimed it for regular use within identity politics. African American women’s lives in pre- and post-Civil War America were a stark contrast from the lives of white women. During that time, the myth of the promiscuous Black woman served to justify the exploitation of slaves’ bodies and commodification of their sexuality and fertility (Collins, 2000; Harris-Perry, 2011; West, 1995). The portrayal of women as insatiable hypersexual beings not only made them responsible for their sexual victimization; it also made them deserving of victimization for failing to act in gender appropriate ways (Jordan, 1969). The jezebel’s sexual appetite is a blatant disregard for the chastity expected of women and an embrace of masculine behaviors (Collins, 2000). Contemporary applications of the jezebel push her oppression

to include gender, race, class, and sexuality. Not only is her sexual liberation viewed as deviant, her promiscuity is not limited to heterosexual encounters. Thus, she exists across the boundaries of heterosexuality and bisexuality and/or lesbianism (Collins, 2000). Collectively, these depictions of Black womanhood share a common core concept, they “represent elite white male interests in defining Black women’s sexuality and fertility” (Collins, 2000, p. 93).

Controlling images: Non-Black women of Color

Most of the intersectionality literature, particularly the literature examining media portrayals of women of Color, focuses on Black women. The exclusion of other races and ethnicities is not an intentional dismissal of those women, their identities, or their experiences. It is largely a reflection of research availability and media representation. However, non-Black women of Color experience stereotypes similar those assigned to Black women, particularly those stereotypes that are based on sexuality. For example, Asian women are often depicted within an East-West binary that situates west as white and masculine and east as feminine, passive, and ‘other’ (Wilkinson, 1990). Asian women are also exoticized as either a lotus blossom or dragon lady. The lotus blossom, who exists as a passive love interest of white men, versus the cunning and hypersexual dragon lady (Tajima, 1989). A modern stereotype of Asian women is the idea of the overbearing “Tiger Mom.” Chua (2011) uses the term in reference to her own experience with strict parents and the pressure to succeed academically. While not inherently a reference to women’s sexuality, tiger moms contribute to stereotypes of “smart Asians” by focusing almost exclusively on intellectual success. Furthermore, tiger parenting implies a dichotomous version of motherhood, where Western parenting is viewed as

nurturing and respectful, compared to the demanding and critical practices of Asian parenting (Chua, 2011).

Native American women often experience fetishization within white male patriarchal society. Media portrayals of Indigenous women are based on a “Pocahontas paradox” that romanticizes the convergence of a strong and powerful woman with an exotic and lustful one (Brooks & Hebert, 2006; Portman & Herring, 2001). For example, the construction of Pocahontas in the 1995 Disney film has commodified the historical significance of Pocahontas (the historical figure). This commodification has reduced her to a “sexualized Native American Barbie” that exists primarily in relation to her white lover, John Smith (Brooks & Hebert, 2006, p. 304).

Finally, Latina women experience a range of sexuality-based stereotypes. Their curvy and shapely bodies situate them similarly to the Black jezebel who is hypersexual and positioned to be exploited. Latinas are also portrayed as being “tacky and overly emotional” (Valdivia, 1995). The ‘spicy Latina’ trope is a fetishized iteration of the loud and angry Sapphire. Keller (1994) proposes three Latina stereotypes that are frequently used in media representations, notably all of which exist in relation to a white love interest – 1) the Cantina Girl who is largely an oversexed object of lust and temptation, 2) the Suffering Senorita whose character follows a ‘good girl, gone bad’ storyline, ending in her bodily sacrifice to protect a white lover, and 3) the Vamp, who like the Cantina Girl is sexually alluring. However, the Vamp is also clever and manipulates men into violent competition for her (p. 40; Merskin, 2007). Inversely, Latinas in entertainment media are also depicted in ways that either renders them ethnically ambiguous effectively erasing cultural representation or conforming to stereotypical expectations such as

playing roles as domestic workers (i.e., maids, housekeepers) (Brooks & Hebert, 2006). Controlling images of Latinas perpetuate a stereotypical pan-ethnic identity that dehumanizes and essentializes Latinx experiences and cultures.

Controlling images of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other women of Color are not always mutually exclusive (West, 1995). Individually, these stereotypes encompass the many ways in which race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality intersect to contribute to oppression and marginalization. What matters most here is the role of controlling images in satisfying the “dominant gaze” (Russell, 1991) and “male gaze” (Mulvey, 1975). The “dominant gaze” in media is the tendency to minimize the identity and exploit experiences of people of Color while simultaneously presenting dominant (white) views as normative (Russell, 1991). The “male gaze” posits that the media submits the female body to control and interpretation by the (heterosexual) male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). Furthermore, the male gaze suggests that visual pleasure from Hollywood films one must maintain patriarchal views that “men look and women are looked at” (Russell, 1991, p. 244). Thus, controlling images contribute to the public’s distorted understanding of non-white womanhood and experiences because those constructions are dictated by white (dominant) men (male) gazes.

Role of the Media

The mass media has been documented as having an effect on how viewers construct their social reality (Gerbner, 1990), largely in relation to crime, opinions about minority populations, and stereotypes (Dixon, 2007). Entertainment, film, and news outlets influence society in a way that informs the public’s worldview by either changing, reinforcing, or perpetuating stereotypes regarding various demographics of people

(Entman & Rojecki, 2000). While many institutions are in place to shape social structure, “the media are the primary agent of socialization in which participants are seduced, educated, and transformed by ideas concerning race, gender, and class” and the themes of the ideas being communicated “often support White supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (Littlefield, 2008, p. 676). Moreover, media sources are largely responsible for the construction of moral panics that result as challenges to social order, particularly those related to crime (Cohen, 2000; Critcher, 2008). Moral panics are “conditions, episodes, person, or group that emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible” (Cohen, 1980, p.9). Thus, the reach of the media not only affects how people are constructed, but also how social phenomena are portrayed and the amount of threat consumers should perceive.

Race and the media

In regard to crime and offenders, the media broadly, and the news specifically, present crime in a way that suggests people of Color are devilish lawbreakers while whites are saviors of social order (Dixon & Linz, 2000a). Stated differently, the visual of a Black criminal and white officer in the news activates stereotypes that associate black (or dark skin) with law breaking and white skin with upholding the law (Dixon, 2007). Even when neither the offender’s nor the officer’s race is explicitly stated, media consumers express a high likelihood of a Black offender and white officer (Dixon, 2007).

The media's attack on people of Color can be seen most prominently in reports from the late 1980s and 1990s era of the "super predator." During this time, adolescents of Color were the source of a moral panic and heightened media attention (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998; Moriearty, 2009).¹¹ The Central Park Jogger case in 1989 set the stage for the media narrative of "violent, remorseless and impulsive pre-adults responsible for widespread mayhem" (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998, p. 1). This case permeated the American consciousness and saturated consumers with images of Black and Brown young males who were, presumably, guilty of violent crimes. A high-profile real estate figure at the time sponsored full-page advertisements in New York City's major newspapers calling for the accused Central Park Five to face the death penalty, while also spewing a position of hatred, racism, and inflaming public opinion surrounding the case. The Central Park Jogger case happened on the heels of the 1988 Presidential race which relied heavily on the 1987 rape committed by Willie Horton while he was on furlough. Not only did the Willie Horton case present Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis as weak on crime, the advertisements used to convey that message perpetuated Conservative, white fear of violent Black men (Duvernay, 2016).

Research shows that whites do, in fact, associate racial minorities with violent crime (Dixon, 2007; Gordon, Michaels, & Nelson, 1996). The media emphasizes crime as a race problem which "serves to activate widely shared stereotypes about racial minorities" (Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996, p. 8). Thus, media viewers come to connect race and crime, and view crime through lenses of racial stereotypes (Gilliam et al., 1996). Since a majority of people receive most of their information about crime from

¹¹ Superpredator is a term coined and popularized by John J. Dilulio Jr. in the 1990s which referred to violent, remorseless youth.

various media sources (Russell, 1995), it is understandable that the media, especially the news, contributes to viewers' cognitive associations between crime (i.e., violent crime) and minorities (i.e., Black people) (Jackson, 2018; Oliver & Fonash, 2002).

Media depictions of crime tell a distorted story of whites being over-represented as victims while simultaneously underrepresenting Black victims and over-representing Black and Brown people as perpetrators, a stark deviation from crime statistics (Dixon & Linz, 2000b; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Furthermore, American news outlets convey crime in a way that sends a message of undeniable violence and danger. This serves to satisfy Americans' preoccupation with fear of crime and public safety even though most do not come into direct contact with crime (Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996). News programs specifically highlight the violent crime committed by minorities (Gilliam et al., 1996). The threat of this violence is largely linked to people of Color, specifically Blacks, and the fear of this threat is carried by whites (Eitle, D'Alessio, & Stolzenberg, 2002; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Even in news magazines, "criminals are conceptualized as Black people, and crime as the violence they do to whites" (Elias, 1994, p. 4; see also Gilliam et al., 1996). This notion is further supported by what Romer, Jamieson, and DeCoteau (1998) call "ethnic blame discourse." Ethnic blame discourse situates crime as a conflict within outgroups (i.e., Blacks and Latinx populations) that negatively affects the in-group (whites). The association with Black and Brown skin as criminogenic coupled with white victimization or guardianship is the result of ethnic blame discourse (Dixon & Linz, 2000a; Romer et al., 1998).

Gender and the media

Media coverage of crime and offenders reinforces assumptions about the propensity for men to be offenders and women to be victimized. Therefore, the research examining female offenders in the media is fairly sparse within the larger body of literature that focuses on crime and its portrayal in media outlets. Fortunately, recent collected works have taken feminist and intersectional approaches to examine women's offending and the media, specifically women's experiences with violence (Humphries, 2009) and juvenile girls' involvement in aggressive behavior (McQueeney & Girgenti-Malone, 2018). Of the current literature on women in media, much of it focuses on media narratives of middle-class, heterosexual whiteness as normative and ideal for girls' and women's behavior (Andersen et al., 2018; Bailey, 2009; McQueeney & Girgenti-Malone, 2018; Meloy & Miller, 2009). Even for women and girls who do not meet the expectations of ideal behavior, extant research still finds that white, suburban middle-class femininity is the yardstick by which all other femininities are measured. White middle-class normative values are the hallmark of patriarchal social structure. Thus, the media serves to reinforce patriarchal construction of gender performance and expectations of women and girls.

Patriarchy's influence on media is largely a consequence of the male-dominated field of journalism. Women generally do not reach decision making positions in communications professions (Sharma, 2002). Of the women who do reach the newsroom in journalism, they often report feelings of 'otherness' and exclusion from the boys club of the communications industry (Steiner, 2002). Furthermore, when women are granted a seat at the proverbial table, men still dictate the stories covered and the values being

reflected (Everbach & Flournoy, 2007). The voice of the media continues to be a masculine one (Humphries, 2009). As a result, those stories communicate patriarchal values that often perpetuate rape culture and reinforce rape myths and their acceptance.¹²

Sex crimes and the media

In a culture where sex and violence sell, sex crime stories make up about ten percent of crime stories and the fear that they generate makes them particularly newsworthy without extra sensationalization (Dowler, 2006). Like the overrepresentation of minorities as criminals, media representations of sex crimes, especially rape, misconstrue them as perpetrated by perverse or “sick” men, committed mostly by strangers, and are over-reliant on rhetoric that blames the victim (Dowler, 2006). The media perpetuates sex offender myths (such as the likelihood of recidivism, homogeneity, and being beyond the help of rehabilitative treatments) that do not match empirical data yet contribute to moral outrage and panic. In fact, Galeste and colleagues (2012), for example, find that approximately forty percent of news stories about sex crimes include empirically inaccurate myths about sex offenders. Instead, sex crime stories tend to be communicated in ways that imply constant danger and strike fear into news consumers. Furthermore, the public, in general, tends to feel especially fearful about the sexual victimization of children. Sensationalized media stories of child abductions or sexual victimization committed by strangers illicit a very visceral sense of panic for the public (Galeste, Fradella, & Vogel, 2012). Sexual abuse of children is a social problem that is

¹² Rape myths, defined by Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994), are “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134).

legitimated by the media, though not empirically supported in terms of frequency or likely perpetrators (Galeste et al., 2012).

Benedict (1992) states that sex crimes stories in the media, specifically rape, are written in a way that reflects the white male dominance of journalism. In other words, media portrayals of rape reflect patriarchal values, including rape as a tool of fear used by men to scare women into submission. Media reports of crime have been closely tied to the heightened fear of victimization expressed by women (Dowler, 2006; Stanko, 1992). Patriarchal social structures have primed women to expect to be victimized by men. Therefore, media coverage of crime, generally, and sex crimes specifically, encourages that constant fear. However, sexual aggression as normative male behavior means that media sources largely neglect explicitly gendered or racialized coverage of sex offenders.

Female sex offenders and the media

When it comes to female sex offenders, the prevailing media narrative is an emotionally distraught woman, usually a teacher, who either “made a mistake” or believed she was truly in love with an underage student. The student is often regarded as a voluntary, willing participant of the relationship (Frei, 2008). However, overall, female sex offending goes largely uncovered by news media sources. Instead, women and their relation to crime are more newsworthy when they are victims because society has deemed them to be a vulnerable population due to their role as primary caregivers (Frei, 2008) and their perceived weakness compared to men. Furthermore, female sex offending is usually intra-familial (Sandler & Freeman, 2007; Vandiver & Kercher, 2002; 2004) which goes against the narrative of the stranger abducting children that media reporters find particularly newsworthy (Cheit, 2003; Frei, 2008). Traditional sex scripts and social

beliefs about women's propensity to harm or their perceived dangerousness may also influence newsworthiness (Christensen, 2017; Denov, 2004). That is, women as sex offenders may not be 'sexy' news because society generally does not find women dangerous or scary. Instead, society associates female sexual offenders with romanticized teacher-student lover relationships involving "misguided" women (Christensen, 2017; Frei, 2008, p. 497). The public in general struggles to associate women with predatory actions so much so that not only are anger, outrage, and calls for highly punitive sanctions mostly directed towards male sex offenders rather than female sex offenders (Christensen, 2017), there are romanticized images of cougars, "Mrs. Robinson" fantasies, and caricatures of "Stiffler's mom."

Studies have shown that media stories covering sex offense crimes tend to describe the offender and the crime itself through a lens of sympathy when the perpetrator is a woman, compared to the expressed disgust towards male offenders even when the offenses are otherwise the same (Chiotti, 2009; Landor, 2009). However, Christensen (2017) finds that news articles over the last five years have shifted to discussing female sex offenders as dangerous, psychologically damaging, and fully accountable for their actions. This shift in media portrayals of female sex offenders may reflect shifting social standards towards more egalitarian gender roles (Christensen, 2017). Alternatively, shifts in media portrayals may be a response to the perceived moral panic of female sex offenders, particularly those in educator roles who victimize their teenage students. For example, when Mary Kay Letourneau married Vili Fualaau in 2005 and the infamous Debra Lafave made headlines later that year, the public may have

become more concerned about the safety of school-aged children and the accountability of women who exploit their students.¹³

A significant gap in Christensen's (2017) article, however, and one this dissertation attempts to address, is the interconnected role of race and ethnicity in addition to gender in media portrayals of female sex offenders. In a society predicated on white, male supremacy the intersections of race and gender cannot be ignored when discussing crimes committed by women, specifically women of Color. Intersectionality frameworks are necessary to understand portrayals of women of Color who bear the weight of racial and gender marginalization and are seldom afforded the protections of their white counterparts. This is especially important in discussing female sex offenders of Color. The implications of historical sexual victimization and oppression coupled with contemporary victimization experiences of trauma and abuse experienced by women of Color may play a role in how women of Color engage in sex crimes and, thus, how they are portrayed by media outlets.

In summary, the structure in place within white, hetero-patriarchal society is very rigid in its construction of a binary gender system and the expectations of each gender. Men should strive for hegemonic masculinity, an expression of masculinity based on strength, dominance, aggression, and subordination of women. On the other hand, women should adhere to the tenets of emphasized femininity which includes chastity, passiveness, and submission to men. Deviation from these prescribed gender roles is an abhorrent social crime. As a result of these rigid expectations, sexual offending behaviors of women are not fully researched, acknowledged, or understood.

¹³ Mary Kay Letourneau, a former teacher, was arrested in 1997 for second degree rape of her then-student, Vili Fualaau. She was incarcerated from 1998 until 2004.

Furthermore, much of the female sex offender literature is based on studies with small clinical samples and findings not widely generalizable. Despite problematic methodologies, existing typologies of female sex offenders attribute much of the offending to trauma and victimization women experience in childhood or in adult intimate partner relationships. Additionally, the literature examining media portrayals of sex offenders are often gendered in their discussions and they may adhere to and perpetuate traditional sex scripts about the victim and the offender, along with representations of people of Color as criminals and the various stereotypes attributed to women of Color.

Overall, this review of the literature provides a foundation upon which to examine how the media portrays female sex offenders. This examination happens within the context of traditionally prescribed gender roles and women's experiences as offenders of sex-based crimes. Second, this review of the literature provides the framework for understanding if and how racist and/or sexist ideologies influence how female sex offenders are depicted in news media. For example, the media may situate female sex offenders of Color within a narrative that paints them as jezebels or emasculating matriarchs versus white female sex offenders who may be portrayed in a more sympathetic light of broken womanhood or madness that needs treatment. Informed by extant research on race and gender-based stereotypes, this project combines gender construction, female sex offender literature, and media influences with intersectional feminist theory to determine how the media portrays women accused of sex offending, specifically, discerning if and how media depictions of female sex offenders are racialized.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on media portrayals of women accused of sex-based crimes. The media's depiction of the stereotypical sex offender as a middle-aged white male leaves minimal room in the social consciousness to imagine a female sex offender, specifically a woman of Color. Additionally, news media portrayals of offenders of Color have largely been dependent on white fear of Black male criminals (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilliam et al., 1996) with less emphasis on Black female offenders (for exceptions see McQueeney & Girgenti-Malone, 2018). Lastly, media portrayals of women of Color are heavily dependent upon stereotypical tropes rooted in racism and sexism (Littlefield, 2008), appealing to the heterosexual male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), and the dominant white gaze (Russell, 1991). These portrayals have withstood time and have molded public opinion about women of Color. Using this understanding of media influence, this project poses the following research question: How are female sex offenders portrayed in the media? Specifically, how are those depictions of female sex offenders racialized? To answer these questions, this project employs a qualitative content analysis paired with a multiple case study design, guided by an intersectional feminist framework to examine the media coverage of eight Florida educators who were each charged and convicted of having sexual relationships with a student in their care. These women were purposefully chosen based on their range of ethno-racial representation and the informed assumption that there will be anticipatable differences in the findings (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2018).

Qualitative Research

The purpose of this study is to identify discourse that may perpetuate racial bias and inequality via media messages that communicate controlling images. This dissertation draws from multiple qualitative traditions to examine the ways in which news media coverage of female sex offenders reinforces patriarchal values. This study is particularly interested in how newspaper coverage of female sex offenders is racialized in ways that perpetuate racial, ethnic, and gender-based marginalization.

Qualitative research uses language to understand individuals and phenomena instead of the quantity of subjects (Higgins, 2009). In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative methods focus on context, interpretation, and meaning-making over counting occurrences (Cassell & Symon, 1994). Qualitative methodologies involve subject driven, as opposed to theory-driven, research. In fact, qualitative methods are the foundation upon which theoretical concepts are built (Tewksbury, 2009). One of the key strengths of qualitative research is that it provides opportunities for a rich in-depth understanding of data and is, therefore, the most compatible methodology for intersectional research (Hunting, 2014; Potter, 2015). Intersectionality focused research requires thorough exploration of interwoven sources of inequality. Such issues must be approached with a critical eye for context and detail. It is this level of understanding and depth that justifies the rationale for using qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). The purpose of this study, to identify discourse that may perpetuate racial bias, inequality, and controlling images in media depictions of female sex offenders, justifies the focus on in-depth media portrayals of a small, diverse sample of female sex offenders in opposition to a broad study of

media portrayals of female sex offenders, which tends to be a relatively homogenous group.

Intersectional Feminist Framework

“Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences...Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). This dissertation focuses not on race and gender independently but as intermingling factors influencing social structure and lived experiences. Few studies have examined the role of interlocking sources of oppression and their role in influencing the creation and maintenance of controlling images (Norris & Billings, 2017); and, with few exceptions (see McQueeney & Girgenti-Malone, 2018), virtually no studies have researched that relationship’s effect on the depiction of crime in the media. Intersectional analysis aims to identify and evaluate intersecting patterns of social positions and power structures (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). It is a lens through which multiple identities are understood to impact experiences of inequality, and how such marginalization is perpetuated by social institutions (MacKinnon, 2013).

Intersectionality orients our understanding of how and why certain populations are more prone to negative stereotypes (Norris & Billings, 2017). For this study, the intersections of interest are those including race/ethnicity and gender. Intersectionality-focused research must be clear in the intersections being examined (Hunting, 2014). Thus, these identities were chosen, first as an opportunity to contribute to the overall intersectionality literature. This research serves to expose an understudied demographic of sexual offenders and provide an alternative to the white, male sexual predator.

Additionally, by examining the intersection of race and gender, this project highlights how women of Color experience further marginalization by stereotypical discourse in media coverage of female offenders. Given that this research focuses on race and gender indicators in the media, using an intersectional lens is paramount to this analysis as the experiences of women of Color cannot be divided between race or gender. Because racism, sexism, and patriarchy are interconnected social institutions, they collectively work to dictate who is classified as criminal, what behaviors are considered criminal, and the crimes society deems most egregious (Norris & Billings, 2017; Roberts, 1993). It is the overlap of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity that inform public perceptions of crime and criminals (Barack, Flavin, & Leighton, 2001) and those perceptions are reinforced and supported by the media.

Intersectional work requires the researcher to consider inequality's role in the inclusion and exclusion of groups from social structures, as well as, the similarities and differences of lived experiences between and within groups (Cole, 2009). Like Andersen and colleagues (2018), this project focuses on print media (i.e., newspapers) as a social institution that "creates and reinforces inequality" (p. 11), perpetuates stereotypes, and negatively impacts social consciousness through its illustration of female sex offenders. MacKinnon (2013) states "categories, stereotypes and classifications are authentic instruments of inequality" (p. 1023) meaning, they (stereotypes) are the result of intersecting identities; however, stereotypes in and of themselves do not create inequality. Intersectional methodology seeks to understand both the outcome (i.e., stereotypes) and the process by which social forces create and reinforce existing identity hierarchies (MacKinnon, 2013). Stated differently, intersectionality, as a method, incorporates the

symbiotic relationship between law and society to understand the outcomes of inequality, as well as the social dynamics that perpetuate inequality. Based on that understanding, the current study anticipates either implicit or explicit descriptors that depict controlling images of women, especially women of Color, which reinforce racist and sexist ideologies about sex offending crimes and the women who commit them.

In this study, intersectionality serves as the guiding perspective for qualitative data collection and analysis. This study draws on the symbiotic relationship between patriarchy and the mass media and their combined influence on the communication of stories about female sex offenders. Media outlets convey messages through discourse and images that cannot simply be counted but must be read and interpreted within social and historical context. Tewksbury (2009) states that qualitative methodology is “about gaining true understandings of the social aspects of how crime occurs and how the agents, structures, and processes of responding to crime operate in culturally-grounded contexts” (p.39). In other words, qualitative research focuses on the social and cultural contexts in place to understand crime; in this case, those contexts refer to the social constructions of race, ethnicity, and gender that are communicated via media portrayals of female sex offenders.

Case Study Research Design

Creswell (2013) defines case study research as “the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97; see also Yin, 2003). A case study is the approach one takes to decide what will be studied (Stake, 2000). Stake (1978) argues that though case studies have traditionally been used for theory building, the best use of this approach of inquiry is to expand our understanding of a phenomenon as

opposed to narrowly explaining it. The object is to understand why things happen and the contextual realities surrounding them (Anderson, 1993). This specific qualitative approach is best used when: (1) answering ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions, (2) the behavior of participants cannot be manipulated by the researcher, (3) there are contextual conditions relevant to the topic being studied that need to be examined, or (4) there are blurred boundaries between the context of the topic and the topic itself (Baxter & Jack, 2008; see also Yin, 2003). For this project, the research question -- how are female sex offenders portrayed in the media, specifically, how are those portrayals racialized -- justifies the use of a case study approach. The goal of understanding a specific phenomenon, in this case media portrayals of female sex offenders, lends itself to the use of a case study approach (Stake, 1995).

The current study employs, specifically, a multiple (or collective) case study design. Multiple case study designs examine several cases to identify between-case similarities and differences (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The logic supporting a multiple case design, here, is theoretical replication. That is, the cases selected were chosen based on anticipatable reasons that there will be contrasting results (Yin, 2018). Moreover, in addressing interviews in qualitative case study research, Yin (2003) maintains that there is a “rule-based” and “theory-guided” method involved in the analysis of interview transcripts for case study research. Kohlbacher (2006) and myself maintain that there is similar robustness in using qualitative content analysis methods for case study research.

Case selection

The cases for this case study design are the women selected into the sample. This study focuses on eight different cases involving female sex offenders registered in the

Florida Sex Offender Registry. To examine the news' construction of female sex offenders, this study uses a maximum variation purposeful sampling strategy. Creswell (2013) states that maximum variation involves "documenting diverse variations of individuals based on specific characteristics" (p. 158). In other words, maximum variation establishes criterion that clearly differentiates the cases and then selects cases, based on the criteria, which have differing perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). In collective (multiple) case studies, Creswell suggests this approach of selecting diverse cases in order to "describe multiple perspectives about the cases" (2013; p. 156). As this study attempts to understand racialized depictions of female sex offenders in the media, it is imperative to include women of different racial or ethnic identities to reflect differences in depictions.

Patton (2002), additionally, notes that the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select cases rich in information and capable of providing insight into the research questions. The eight women chosen for this study were selected based on their ethno-racial diversity, contextual similarities, and statewide notoriety. Selecting these particular cases allows for in-depth examination of each case. Furthermore, choosing extreme (or deviant) cases provides in-depth, rich information due to the unique and highly unusual nature of the case (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). By examining deviant cases it is more feasible to understand both the typical and atypical case (Patton, 2002).

In case study research, inclusion and exclusion criteria are based on the boundaries set around the cases being used (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The binding for this project is informed by Miles and Huberman's (1994) stance of setting case boundaries by definition and context. The case for this study is the individual female sex offender,

defined as a woman who has been convicted of sex-based offenses and registered as a sex offender in Florida. The units of analysis, then, are the newspaper articles collected about each case; specifically, the discourse used in those articles by the media to portray female sex offenders. In order to further bind my cases by definition and context, discourse is defined as the written communication used by the selected media outlets. The context is the notoriety of the incident in 'post-Debra Lafave' Florida; meaning, the case was ubiquitous at the time it occurred and received high-profile media attention in the state of Florida after the 2004-2005 Debra Lafave scandal.

In this study, the offenders' occupation as teacher or teacher's aide is one criterion for selection. In addition to all of the women being teachers, the cases were also selected based on the age and sex of the victim and relationship between the victim and offender – male student victim between the ages of fourteen and seventeen years old. This attention to similar contextual factors attempts to limit the effects of other factors, besides race and ethnicity, on the media portrayal of the selected women.

A sample of articles collected from Tampa Bay Times, the top circulating newspaper in Florida (Agility PR, 2017) was used for initial case selection. Using the Access World News database, also known as Newsbank, the phrase "teacher sex with student" was used to search the Tampa Bay Times from 2005 to 2017. The first 40 articles, which included all articles on page 1 of the search results, were read for relevance and the women with the highest number of mentions were selected into the case study. This selection process offset the rarity of female sex offenders and underreporting of sex crimes by ensuring that the women chosen for the case study would actually have media coverage that could be analyzed. The homogeneity of female sex

offenders, though, made finding similarly situated women of Color difficult to identify, as most female sex offenders are white (Vandiver, 2004). To account for this imbalance, a theoretical sampling approach was used to identify all women of Color in the Florida sex offender registry who were registered within each newspaper's corresponding county (i.e., Tampa Tribune is primarily circulated in Tampa, Florida, which is within the limits of Hillsborough County). Once the female sex offenders of Color were identified within their respective counties, those who satisfied the inclusion criteria were selected into the sample of cases.

The news sources were chosen based on high circulation rates and substantial impact on the state's news-consuming public. For each of the women in the sample, Access World News was used to search each woman's name using the filters: News, 1/1/2007 to 12/31/2017, Newspapers, Tampa Bay Times, Tampa Tribune, The Orlando Sentinel, The Miami Herald, and the South Florida Sun Sentinel. Once the news stories were identified, they were read for relevance, and to determine if requirements for inclusion were met. Based on the established boundaries, the criterion for inclusion was the article had to discuss the specific incident of the chosen woman's sexual offending (as opposed to a story about a less covered incident or female sex offenders in general). A total of 78 articles about 8 women met the inclusion criteria. Table 3.1 summarizes the cases (women) selected and Table 3.2 summarizes the sources and articles selected for analysis.

Table 3.1 Female Sex Offender Case Demographics and Case Year

Offender	Year	Race/Ethnicity
Alicia Bromfield	2016	Black
Christina Butler	2007	White
Dellys Serrano-Rosario	2010	Latina

Maria Hernandez	2009	Latina
Mary Jo Spack	2008	White
Stephanie Ragusa	2008	White
Valerie Valvo	2017	Latina
Wanda Smith	2008	Black

Table 3.2 Number of Articles per Source

Newspaper Source	Number of Articles
Tampa Bay Times	33
Tampa Tribune	29
Orlando Sentinel	8
South Florida-Sun Sentinel	2
Miami Herald	4

Qualitative Content Analysis

Krippendorff (1989) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (p.403). In quantitative research it is particularly useful in the social sciences as a way of turning symbolic communications into data (Krippendorff, 1989). On the other hand, qualitative content analysis (QCA) is a “method for describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way” (Schreier, 2012, p. 1). The descriptive nature of the current project means that the data does not necessarily speak for itself. This research examines the narrative being presented regarding women who engage in sexual offending, versus counting reported occurrences of women sexually victimizing youth which would be more quantitative in nature (Altheide, 1987; Christensen, 2017). Therefore, QCA is the method best suited for interpreting this media data and assigning meaning to it. Also, given that QCA was originally developed to analyze and interpret text, such as newspaper articles, it is an appropriate method for this project (Altheide, 1996; Schreier, 2012). The

unit of analysis for this study, newspaper articles, warrants a qualitative text analysis. Also, given that this research attempts to understand complex social phenomena and connections, in line with case study research, a qualitative content analysis is an appropriate analytical method (Kohlbacher, 2006).

In studies of crime and media, content analyses may be used to supplement quantitative surveys of public opinion. Kort-Butler (2016) states that where quantitative sources focus on how people feel about crime, content analysis of media focuses on the sociocultural narrative about crime. That is, qualitative content analysis examines meaning in the messages being produced by media more so than individual consumers' thoughts or attitudes about crime. The media, in general, represents a warehouse of the public's ideas about crime and has tremendous influence on creating, changing, or maintaining cultural understanding of crime (Kort-Butler, 2016). Race, gender, and crime are socially constructed, and the following analysis attempts to reveal how those constructs are perpetuated through media depictions of women who engage in sex-based offenses.

In qualitative content analysis, the focus is on the narrative, the story being told, with particular attention being paid to the "characters" involved in the story. Media portrayals of characters involved in crime reinforce public thoughts about whom and what is defined as criminal or deviant (Kort-Butler, 2016). This project examines newspaper articles and the extent to which they assign meaning to racial and ethnic differences of female sex offenders in Florida. This study uses a concept-driven approach that draws from established theories about race and gender constructs, individually and together, to reveal larger main categories.

Sensitizing concepts

One of the pitfalls of qualitative research is the ease of getting overwhelmed and lost in the data. To offset, this study uses sensitizing concepts to orient the data. First proposed by Blumer (1954), sensitizing concepts provide a general reference for concepts in the absence of specific benchmarks. Stated differently, “a sensitizing concept is a starting point in thinking about a class of data of which the social researcher has no definite idea and provides an initial guide to her research” (van den Hoonaard, 1997, p.2). The sensitizing concepts serve as a guide to help qualitative researchers from going into the data blind. In a research tradition where the concepts and themes should reveal themselves from the data, sensitizing concepts help to focus the researcher’s attention without violating one of the central tenets of qualitative research methods. There is no set way of identifying sensitizing concepts, however, the rules set forth by Blumer (1954, p. 6-7) and van den Hoonaard (1997, p. 36) focus on eliminating vagueness: 1) the concept must clearly refer to empirical content, 2) the concept must go beyond a general, common sense understanding to a specific one, and 3) the concept must be relevant to the empirical world. As such, sensitizing concepts for this study reflect the extant literature and intersectional feminist framework. The presented sensitizing concepts were developed using existing intersectionality and intersectional criminology literature (Barak, Flavin, & Leighton, 2001; Collins & Bilge, 2016; McQueeney & Girgenti-Malone, 2018; Potter, 2015) and extant research on female sex offenders (Christensen, 2017; Crew, 1991; Denov, 2004; Dirks et al., 2015; Gakhal & Brown, 2011; Zack et al., 2016). The sensitizing concepts informed the first round of open coding and were

referenced and revisited throughout the constant comparative method employed for this study. Table 3.3 lists and defines the sensitizing concepts used to guide the current study.

Table 3.3 Sensitizing Concepts

Sensitizing Concept	Definition
Race	Specific or implied reference to the color of the woman's skin
Gender	References to the woman's gender as a negative or positive
Blameworthiness	Reference to the woman's culpability in the crime
Femininity	The woman's adherence to traditional ideal of womanhood such as motherhood or wifely duties
Perception of danger	The extent to which the woman is depicted as a threat to the community

Constant Comparative Coding

The current study uses an inductive approach that involves reading and re-reading each newspaper article to identify specific themes within the articles and determine relationships between the emerging themes (Schreier, 2012). As is necessary for qualitative intersectional research, this analysis focuses on race and gender independently, as well as collectively (Bowleg, 2008; Hunting, 2014). Coding was done based on Glaser's (1965) constant comparative coding method, or CCM.¹⁴ CCM was originally introduced as a method of analysis in the grounded theory tradition. Broadly CCM starts with open coding to reduce the data. Then, the coding continues through a process of comparing incidents that have already been placed into the initial categories (Fram, 2013). Stated differently, the constant comparative method starts with comparing incident to incident, concept to incident, and concept to concept (Elliot & Jordan, 2010;

¹⁴ The constant comparative coding method is also referred to as constant comparative analysis method, constant comparative analysis, or constant comparative coding.

Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Though originally intended for theory development, CCM has expanded in applicability to other qualitative research approaches (Fram, 2013; Leong, Joseph, & Boulay, 2010).

First, primary categories are derived from theoretical explanations of race and gender relations separately. Then, the data are expanded and coded based on themes central to intersectionality (i.e., racism, sexism, and sexuality). Lastly, codes are adapted to reflect differential media depictions of female sex offenders which perpetuate intersections of racism, sexism, and patriarchy (see also Bowleg, 2008). Primary categories and subsequent themes are repeatedly refined and revised for simplicity (avoiding repeat or similar categories) and to improve validity (Kaefer, Roper, & Sinha, 2015; Mayring, 2000). The cyclical nature of CCM – reading, initial coding, reflection, re-reading, and recoding – allows for themes to emerge from the data and serves to triangulate findings and strengthen robustness (Leong et al., 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Analysis

This study uses Nvivo 12, qualitative analysis software, to import the news articles into the program. The articles were assigned to a source classification sheet that included specific attributes of each article: name of the woman involved, title of the article, year of publication/print, name of the newspaper, and author's name. This step not only simplifies and organizes the newspaper articles into the 'cases' of the case study, but also provides an opportunity for patterns to emerge across specific groupings of articles. After reading and re-reading each article, excerpts were selected and placed into the appropriate nodes (i.e., category or subcategory). Some items were applicable to

multiple categories as many are not mutually exclusive. Text search and word frequency queries for specific word combinations were done with various levels of the data, such as within articles and within primary coding categories. This approach helped to verify, condense, or expand themes by revealing whether or not the established categories were an appropriate reflection of what was actually being said in the articles (Kaefer et al., 2015). This is useful for answering the research questions as well as serving as a validity check for the analysis.

Trustworthiness

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) argue that the criteria for judging qualitative research results differ from those used to judge quantitative research, such as reliability and validity. Instead, they support the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 6).

Credibility

Validity checks include reading and re-reading each article to verify that the themes found are an accurate reflection of what the data are actually saying (Kaefer et al., 2015; Krefting, 1991). Credibility refers to a similar process that involves emersion of the researcher into the available literature. By reading other literature that discusses women, people of Color, crime, and media, the findings of this project are compared to other findings to see if similar themes emerged in other studies. Also, in cases where the present findings are not supported by previous research, this serves as an opportunity to consider other explanations or themes that may be more accurate in answering the posed research questions (Creswell, 2013). Another method for ensuring credibility includes

comparing the findings of this qualitative study to a similar study that uses quantitative methods. This method of triangulation, again, either supports the findings or presents more accurate rival explanations.

An additional method of triangulation involves the use of a case study research design in combination with qualitative content analysis as a blend of qualitative traditions. Gillham (2000) posits that using different methods and gathering different types of data provides an opportunity for researchers to determine if the data sources reveal the same information. Therefore, a case study design is the main method by which we analyze different types of data such as documents, archives, and other forms of print media (Gillham, 2000; Kohlbacher, 2006). By using QCA and CCM with a case study design, triangulation happens by applying analysis methods, with a design it may not have been originally developed to compliment (Kohlbacher, 2006). Lastly, though this dissertation is an individual project, discussions and advising with committee members throughout data collection and analysis serves as a check on consistency and inter-coder reliability.

Transferability, Dependability, & Confirmability

Transferability is the “extent to which the researcher’s working hypothesis can be applied to another context” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 6). In other words, in qualitative research, it is the researchers’ responsibility to provide descriptions of data which allows for other researchers to infer whether or not the findings can transfer to other settings. Dependability refers to the consistency of the study’s methodology. Confirmability addresses the necessity of others to draw similar conclusions from the results as the original researcher. Transferability, dependability, and credibility are

established by providing clear and coherent notes and memos about the data. Given the generally subjective nature of qualitative research, this study takes particular care in clearly documenting each phase of data collection and analysis to ensure optimal trustworthiness and replicability.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity – researchers’ consciousness of their own voice while still maintaining credibility (Patton, 2002) – is necessary because qualitative data do not speak for themselves and analysis must be both subjective and objective. Therefore, it is imperative that qualitative researchers recognize positions of bias and how those perspectives come through in their work. The intersectional lens used for this study requires acknowledging the contextual factors involved in social phenomena. In this context, my personal biases may impact my examination of the data from my own positionality at the intersections of marginalized populations. Finally, my positionality as a Black woman and the primary researcher cannot be separated from the current research. I recognize that I may look for things in the data under the backdrop of my own experiences with inequality and inequity that other researchers may not recognize or interpret similarly.

Summary

This study employs qualitative research methods to answer the question: How are female sex offenders portrayed in the media? Specifically, how are those depictions of female sex offenders racialized? A multiple case study approach was used to select eight relatively high-profile Florida female sex offender cases. Guided by an intersectional feminist framework, I use a qualitative content analysis to focus on the 3 major themes

and their respective subthemes that emerged from 78 newspaper articles in the top circulating newspapers in Florida. Through consistent notating and active reflexivity, this dissertation confidently attempts to produce trustworthy results that reveal patriarchal ideas of womanhood perpetuated by newspaper depictions of female sex offenders.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents findings from a qualitative content analysis guided by intersectional feminist frameworks to examine how the media portrays female sex offenders and how those portrayals are racialized. Using a multiple case study research design along with qualitative content analysis, this study reveals three dominant themes – 1) Blameworthiness and Accountability, 2) Bourgeois Standards of Womanhood, and 3) Threat and Dangerousness. Figures 4.1 and Table 4.1 show frequencies of the results of this study’s qualitative findings. The pie chart in Figure 4.1 illustrates the proportion of coverage across all women for each theme—33% of newspaper coverage about female sex offenders addresses blameworthiness, 24% of coverage discusses bourgeois standards of womanhood, and 43% communicates perceived threat and dangerousness. Table 4.1 dichotomizes the data from Figure 4.1 into women of Color (WOC) and white offenders, indicating the percentage of coverage devoted to each theme. For example, 53.6% of coverage involving a female sex offender of Color is in reference to conceptualizations of threat and dangerousness, compared to 37.3% for white female sex offenders. Overall, this study finds support for extant literature that argues that the male dominated perspective of journalism reinforces heteronormative, patriarchal values (Meloy & Miller, 2009). Though the values, in and of themselves, are not racialized, the implications may encourage perceptions of women of Color that align with controlling images. In other words, though not explicitly racist or sexist, the messages communicate

patriarchal expectations of women, generally, and reinforce stereotypes about women of Color.

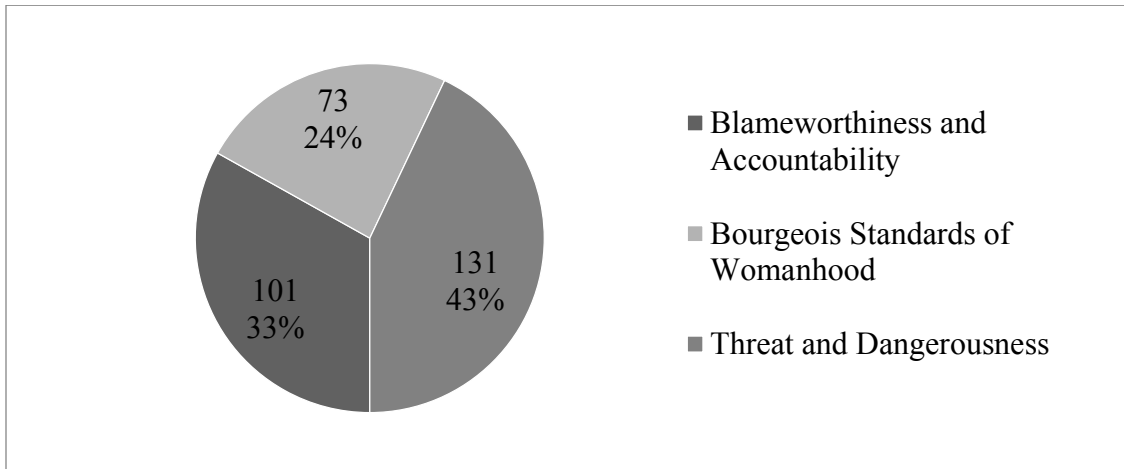


Figure 4.1 Proportion of theme coverage

Table 4.1 Race of Female Sex Offender and Newspaper Coverage of Themes

	Blameworthines s & Accountability	Bourgeois Standards of Womanhood	Threat & Dangerousness	N
WOC	34.7% (11)	11.6% (4)	53.6% (19)	34
White	32.1% (90)	30.5% (69)	37.3% (112)	271
Total %	33% (107)	24% (73)	43% (131)	305
<i>Note: many articles included more than one theme, so frequencies do not sum to total.</i>				

Blameworthiness and Accountability

Blameworthiness and accountability manifested via the bad-mad dichotomy found in other female offender literature (Ballinger, 1996; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002).

The blameworthiness and accountability theme focuses on discourse that communicates the woman’s culpability in the crime. Through this communication, the newspapers engage readers and activate notions of how the public should feel about the female sex

offenders, and thus how the public should respond to the crime. In other words, through this process of priming, the emphasis on blameworthiness and accountability influences the public's perception of an evil and predatory (i.e., "bad") woman in need of scrutiny and punishment, in opposition to a mentally-ill or traumatized (i.e., "mad") woman in need of sympathy and treatment. The following quotes illustrate the typical tone of discourse communicating bad or mad portrayals, respectively.

That and the fact she was caught leaving the home of the older boy after just having sex with him despite already having been arrested twice for having sex with each boy." "I'm not sure you've accepted responsibility," said Circuit Judge Chet A. Tharpe in announcing his sentence. "You stopped only because you got caught and put in jail" [white offender; emphasis added] (Brennan, 2010, p. 5).

During a three-hour hearing Wednesday, psychologists and her friends and family portrayed Butler as a fragile woman who suffered from bipolar disorder, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder and suicidal thoughts. At 13, she was hospitalized with a concussion after being beaten by her stepfather. They said she was not adequately medicated in fall 2007 when she began teaching a special education class at Middleton High. Some of the students harassed her and stole her money and cell phone. A relatively new teacher, Butler said she felt overwhelmed from the start and didn't get proper support from the school administration. "I was scared and depressed and very anxious every day I went to work," she said through tears in court. One student was different, she said. He stood up for Butler, told the bullies to leave her alone. "I saw him not as a 16-year-old student but as a man," she said [white offender; emphasis added] (Jenkins, 2008, p. 1A).

For women portrayed as "bad," the newspapers emphasized the grooming behaviors of the offender leading up to the crime. Grooming behaviors are the actions that sex offenders take towards fostering the relationship with the victim in order to build trust (Tanner & Brake, 2013). Commonly cited grooming behaviors or grooming patterns

include: identifying vulnerabilities within the victim and giving gifts or attention (Tanner & Brake, 2013¹⁵), demonstrated below, respectively:

One young man, then 14 years old, had been assigned to push Ragusa's wheelchair around school after she broke her foot. She told him he seemed shy and that she could help him overcome that, authorities said. That afternoon, she brought him to her apartment. They had sex; the first of three encounters that authorities said took place between October 2006 and May 2007. The teen turned 15 during that time [white offender; emphasis added] (Jenkins, 2010, p. 1A).

The teen later said Serrano regularly gave him rides, stopping to buy him snacks and cigarettes. She began texting him in September, and their relationship became sexual over Christmas vacation, according to the report [Latina offender; emphasis added] (Curtis, 2010, p. B4).

For this study, the media's attention to grooming patterns suggests intentional manipulation of victims. Not only did the relationship exist but an adult woman actively took steps to encourage an inappropriate relationship with a student under her authority and care. Furthermore, in cases where alcohol or drugs were provided, this portrays not only a manipulative woman, but a predatory one.

They went back to Bromfield's apartment, where she gave him vodka and other liquor, the report states. Investigators said the boy told them he was feeling "a little drunk" when Bromfield suggested they watch a movie in her bedroom [Black offender; emphasis added] (Allen, 2016).

By providing drugs and alcohol to minors, the female offender creates an environment to further exploit the power dynamic between teacher and student. The perceived purposeful selection of vulnerable victims who could be manipulated with presents or 'special treatment' lends itself to the perceived "badness" of female sex offenders, regardless of race.

¹⁵ These examples of grooming behaviors are in no way exhaustive. For a comprehensive discussion on the roles, types, and significance of grooming patterns see Tanner and Brake (2013).

White female sex offenders, though, are particularly burdened by labels of bad. In fact, among female sex offenders in this study, white women are more likely to be portrayed as “bad” than “mad,” as shown in Figure XX2. Recall that the evil woman hypothesis argues that it is a double offense when women violate both, the law and prescribed gender roles (Bontrager et al., 1995). Sex crimes are one of the farthest departures from traditionally acceptable womanhood, even among women who engage in crime (Embry & Lyons, 2012). This double offense of legal and social non-conformity warrants penalizations that are harsher than those imposed on more patriarchy-conforming women (Morash & Schram, 2002). Part of that punishment, for the white women in this analysis, may include the public shame and scrutiny that accompanies “bad” associations of blameworthiness and accountability, which provides some support for the evil woman hypothesis and may explain the disparate number of articles for white women compared to the women of Color in the study.

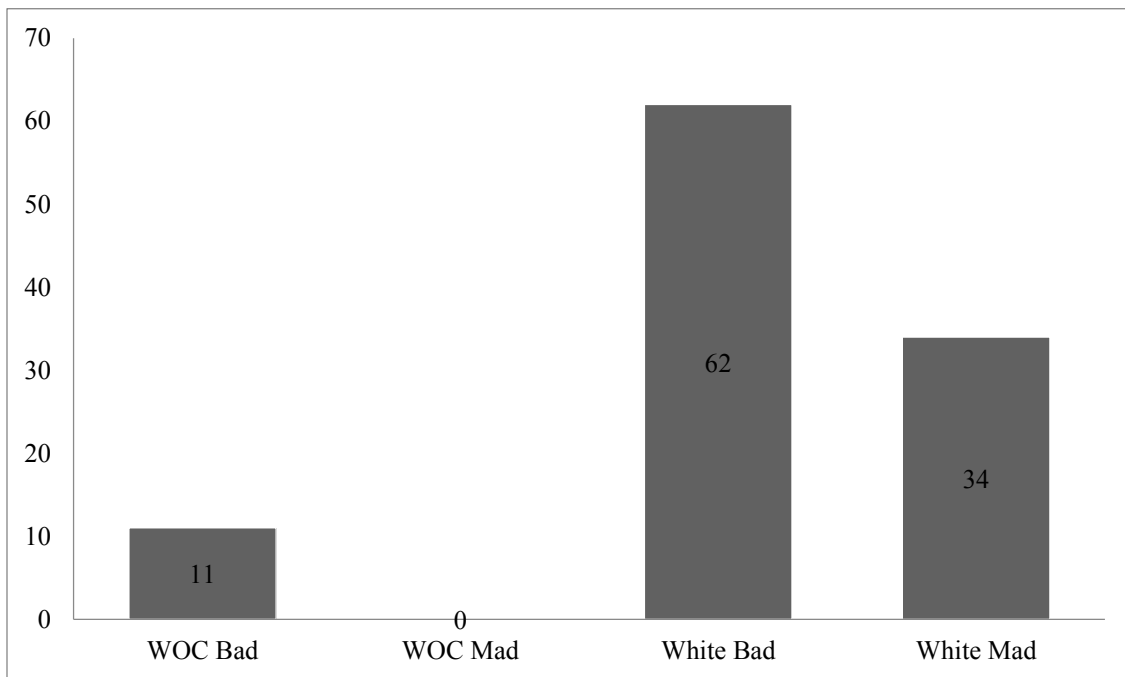


Figure 4.2 Distribution of Bad-Mad Portrayals by Race

Though the women of Color in this study had substantially less newspaper coverage, the proportion of coverage involving blameworthiness and accountability of women of Color is comparable to that of white women at 34.7% and 32.1%, respectively. However, upon closer inspection, there is a distinct difference in the distribution of bad or mad associations. Figure 4.2 illustrates the difference in bad-mad applications across racial lines. For female sex offenders of Color, mad does not surface at all in coverage of their crimes. This aligns with previous feminist and critical race examinations of justice system outcomes that argue within the bad-mad binary of female offenders, the leniency associated with being mad is scarcely extended to women of Color (Arnold, 1990; Dirks et al., 2015). The current findings reflect that binary among female sex offenders. While this does not explicitly communicate a racialized view of blameworthiness and accountability, it may implicitly facilitate a unilateral view of female sex offenders of Color as evil, predatory, or adhering to assumptions created by controlling images. However, it cannot be ignored that female sex offenders of Color seem to be exempt from “mad” associations. If women of Color are not provided a “mad” narrative as an alternative to “bad” narratives, the public is left with only bad messages and may maintain those views about women of Color who offend. The depiction of female sex offenders of Color as inherently “bad” may exacerbate stereotypes about women of Color—and public perceptions about people of Color, generally—and in turn perpetuate racial disparities in justice outcomes.

Bourgeois Standards of Womanhood

Women’s conformity to patriarchal ideals of femininity is an important piece of news media framing. Men dominate the media and news industry; therefore, much of the

news the public receives is filtered through a male lens, including the connections between gender, offending, and victimization (Meloy & Miller, 2009). The male lens of the media contributes to the dispersal of information in a way that reinforces patriarchal values such as male power and female subordination (Meloy & Miller, 2009). In other words, the communication of news includes messages related to how, or if, the women in the story conform to patriarchal expectations of femininity. The theme identified as bourgeois standards of womanhood includes discourse surrounding perceived conformity to or departure from traditional ideals of womanhood or emphasized femininity. This theme was operationalized through references to the woman's status as a wife or mother, her physical appearance and emotional expression, and her nurturing capabilities, including her performance as an educator.

Bourgeois standards of womanhood are informed by white, heteronormative patriarchal ideologies, such standards include domesticity, chastity, and passiveness (Odem, 1992). Women who adhere to these prescribed roles and behaviors are seen as an appropriate example of how women should act; in other words, the ideal woman. Inversely, women who deviate from socially prescribed roles are perceived to be failed women. The ideal woman is commended on her accolades as an educator and conventional attractiveness. She is, generally, portrayed in a positive light. Her crime coverage depicts a blemish on an otherwise spotless display of womanhood, to which she should present remorse and regret for her behavior. For women within an ideal narrative, the offense is mentioned as a one-off deviation alongside commendable traits that are a true reflection of her.

A Wesley Chapel resident who is married and the mother of a 13-year-old daughter, Spack has taught at Freedom since 2004 after transferring from

Chamberlain High School. Her personnel file didn't contain an explanation for the transfer. School district spokeswoman Linda Cobbe said the district had no record of any problem. Instead, her file was filled with letters of commendation and glowing performance reviews. Aside from teaching English and reading, Spack was the sponsor of the boys lacrosse club. Spack "is an accomplished educator who always goes above and beyond for all students," a 2003 evaluation stated [white offender; emphasis added] (Sickler, 2008, p. 3B).

"It hasn't quite sunk in yet," said Christie Gold, Freedom's English department chairwoman who has known Spack since 2002. "She had an outstanding reputation. Smart and dynamic. Very upbeat and positive. I just don't want to believe it." [white offender; emphasis added] (Sickler, 2008, p. 3B).

Failed women, however, are portrayed as women who actively reject patriarchal expectations, especially the demand of chastity.

On Thursday, the Web site for the MJ Morning Show, a radio program broadcast on WFLZ, 93.3 FM, posted photographs taken several years ago of an exotic dancer it speculated might be Butler. The photos posted on the radio show's site are the same photos that appear with the name "Froggy" on the nightclub's Web site. Butler has two tattoos of frogs, police records show. If Butler is the woman depicted in the photos, and if the district knew about such a background, it is unlikely she would have been hired, Hegarty said. "I think with most principals, it would raise an eyebrow, and they would hesitate to hire someone with a background like that," he said [white offender; emphasis added] (Kalfrin & Echeagaray, 2007, p.1).

Furthermore, for women who are not remorseful or apologetic in their trials, media outlets appear to draw readers' attention to her 'inappropriate' emotional expression specifically by highlighting the gendered context of the woman's demeanor. For example, the following quote is in regard to the woman's smile in her police mug shot; note how it also reiterates the gendered assumption that women who smile the way this offender smiled only do so in relation to heteronormative flirting rituals.

The woman accused of having sex with a 14-year-old boy looked into the lens of a camera mounted between white lights and did something puzzling. She smiled. The smile wasn't shy, or subtle. She beamed big and toothy, her lips parted, the lines in her cheeks forming parentheses around an A' grin. Her left eyebrow was slightly cocked, her forehead barely wrinkled, and she wore a look you'd expect to

see on a drunk accountant at the bar if he were, say, complimenting your eyes [white offender; emphasis added] (Montgomery, Tampa Bay Times, 2008, p. 1E).

For white women, the burden of acceptable femininity weighs heavier compared to the women of Color in this study. Bourgeois standards of womanhood emphasize middle-class white women's version of feminine expression (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996; Collins 2009). Thus, the expectation of conformity is heightened for white women and they are expected to epitomize the preferred femininity, lest they be assumed nonchalant about their crimes.

The smile came back to haunt former Davidsen Middle School teacher Stephanie Ragusa. A judge said Monday that her constant grinning and frivolity during court hearings undermined her claims of remorse for having sex with two male students, then ages 14 and 16 [white offender; emphasis added] (Brennan, 2010, p. 5).

For women of Color, on the other hand, conformity to traditional standards of (white) femininity is largely unexpected (Young, 1986). Women of Color tend to be masculinized and assumed to be less feminine than white women, particularly related to chastity and sexuality (Adler, 1975; Young, 1980). Controlling images of Black and Latina women have consistently painted a picture based on hyper-sexuality (Collins, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011; Keller, 1994; Merskin, 2007). These images, some of the most steadfast stereotypes of women of Color, communicate an expectation of sexual offending among Black and Latina women. In alignment with prior literature, when women of Color commit sex crimes or are sexually victimized it is not particularly worthy of justice system response because people of Color, both women and men, have a perceived history of sexual insatiability (Collins, 2009). This finding may translate to newsworthiness and provide insight into the lack of media coverage on female sex offenders of Color. That is, in addition to the limited number of known offenders, the

sparse media coverage of Black or Latina female sex offenders may reflect the assumption that this group of women is somehow prone to sexual offending. Therefore, when those crimes inevitably happen it is not perceived as a breaking story that is newsworthy because women of Color are perceived to be unwilling or unable to express acceptable femininity. When women of Color do conform, though, it is communicated in a way that makes the offender an anomaly or an otherwise credit to her race. This sort of positive feedback, though, is not without its own critiques which will be discussed in the following chapter.

She received superlative evaluations for her classroom and the head of Celebration High's science department gave her a recommendation stating, "Great teacher -- will love her," records show [Latina offender; emphasis added] (Curtis, 2010, p. B4).

Where heightened emphasis on femininity seems to signal increased expectations for conformity among white women, for women of Color it may actually perpetuate racialized stereotypes and perceptions about sexual activity. Such portrayals, though not explicitly communicated, may also imply the assumed proclivity for criminal engagement among Black and Latinx people, generally. On the other hand, media coverage of white female sex offenders points to manifestations of the evil woman hypothesis. Having committed sex-based crimes, the women here have committed both a social and legal violation. Given that white women are expected to be the epitome of ideal femininity, the sexual victimization of an underage boy is an especially egregious departure from social norms and mores. This abhorrent rejection of patriarchal standards warrants increased punishment (Embry & Lyons, 2012) and the accompanying shame and stigma of publicity—which may also make white female sex offenders more newsworthy resulting in their increase reporting in news stories compared to non-white women.

Threat and Dangerousness

Threat and dangerousness are operationalized as language that communicates the female offenders' perceived threat to the community or other students. This theme captures how the public is being educated about female sex offenders, their victims, and the legal consequences associated with those crimes. Excerpts from this theme largely focus on criminal justice outcomes and the effects of the crime on the victim; examples below illustrate the tone of the theme, respectively.

Tharpe sentenced Ragusa, 31, to 10 years in prison as well as 15 years of sex offender probation upon her release. It was the maximum he could impose in a plea bargain Ragusa struck with prosecutors and more than triple that imposed recently on any Hillsborough County teacher convicted of sexual improprieties with a student [white offender; emphasis added] (Brennan, 2010, p.5).

The case has weighed on her son. "He has dealt with a lot of guilt," she said. "He blames himself. ... He even got to the point where he became aggressive with everything, just wanting this all to go away" [white offender; emphasis added] (Zayas, 2010, p. 1B).

Articles' mention of justice system processes and outcomes serves to activate associations that Florida readers have about crime and punishment. The general public's knowledge about criminal justice is molded by the media to recognize that this crime warrants that punishment (Dowler, 2003; Galeste et al., 2012).

Former Middleton High School teacher Christina Butler, charged with having sex with a 16-year-old student a year ago, pleaded guilty Thursday to all charges against her. Butler, 34, was offered no plea negotiations, and her sentencing was postponed until Dec. 10. Her charges - contributing to the delinquency of a minor and two counts of unlawful sexual activity with a minor - carry total penalties of more than 30 years in prison. Prosecutor Anthony Duran said the state would ask for substantial jail time [white offender; emphasis added] (Tampa Bay Times, 2008, p. 3B).

The media also presents extreme examples of sex crimes that exacerbate stereotypes about sex offenders (Cheit, 2003; Dowler, 2006; Frei, 2008) and fuel negative views and

ill-formed perceptions of sex offenders (Gakhal & Brown, 2011). This may be truer for female sex offenders of Color where threat and dangerousness is the most re-occurring theme (see Table 4.1), specifically communication of justice system outcomes.

Bromfield is facing charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor and having sex with a 16- or 17-year-old child, records show [Black offender; emphasis added] (Allen, 2016, p. 1B)

She was charged with sexual battery on a child over whom she had custodial authority [Latina offender; emphasis added] (Doup, 2009).

This finding supports prior literature which argues that the media portrays people of Color as more threatening, violent, or dangerous (Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Linz, 2000a; Dixon & Linz, 2000b). While this is not explicitly stated, media coverage focusing on justice system outcomes may point to women of Color needing more punitive punishment; thus, perpetuating the stereotype that people of Color require more social control than whites (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). This may be further emphasized when the news, assumed to be factual, appears alongside hypersexual controlling images of Black or Latina woman in entertainment. Additionally, coverage of female sex offenders of Color that addresses the effects on the victim may also contribute to public assumptions that people of Color are more threatening to others and pose significant danger to those in vulnerable positions.

Effects on the victim are another manifestation of threat and dangerousness. The nature of the crime—sexual victimization of minors—means that media sources offer little to no information about the victim, largely to protect him throughout the trial process. Though, a common element across the stories emphasizes how the crime affected the young man and his family, including the psychological damage sexual victimization may have caused.

Lederman, Miami's top juvenile court judge, ordered that both the youth and his mother undergo psychological testing and receive counseling, and warned the 44-year-old mother that caseworkers from DCF or a court-appointed guardian ad-litem could visit her home at any time unannounced [Latina offender; emphasis added] (Miller & Lebovich, 2009).

Rouson said the youth is "hurt and confused" about the situation. His name is being withheld by the Times because of the nature of the case. He will seek counseling, Rouson said [white offender; emphasis added] (Vansickle, 2007, p. 3B).

His sexual values may be forming along negative lines, such as manipulation and his own sexual satisfaction, Duncan said. "I was used by a woman so now I'm going to use a woman and not give a care about my consequences," Duncan said the teen might reason. He may not be doing this consciously, she said, but this is how he was introduced to sex. Duncan said she does not mean to suggest the victim is the aggressor. Rather, she aims to highlight the effects of victimization [Black offender; emphasis added] (Krause, 2008, p. 1).

The relationship power dynamic potentially exacerbates the relevance of this indicator. By humanizing the consequences of the crime, the newspaper signals to the public how the victim has suffered because of the experience. Furthermore, it reinforces the image of a child who has been hurt or damaged through his loss of innocence. This finding is interesting given research showing that judges who preside over adult female-minor male statutory rape cases express little compassion towards the male victim and find him to be a welcoming participant of the relationship, despite his actual status as a victim (Hlavka, 2016). These competing narratives shed light on how constructions of victimization vary across social institutions but remain molded by widely-held beliefs about gender performance.

Summary of Findings

The themes identified in this study—blameworthiness and accountability, bourgeois standards of womanhood, and threat and dangerousness—reveal discourse that

implicitly reinforces the dominant (white) and male gaze of media through covertly racialized stereotypes and expectations for women of Color (Mulvey, 1975; Russell, 1992). Newspapers' discourse surrounding blameworthiness was framed by bad/mad rhetoric. Articles about women who groomed their victim by providing gifts or alcohol rely on language that depicts the woman as bad, predatory, and guilty (Noh, Lee, & Feltey, 2010). Inversely, women with traumatic histories received reports that seemingly forgave their offending based on sentiments of madness. This division of representation reflected racialized application of bad/mad perspectives with madness being a classification of privilege not extended to women of Color. However, bad perspectives were more common for white women than mad which may, actually, be a testament to their departure from traditional femininity as opposed to perceived culpability.

The bourgeois standard of womanhood is an expression of middle-class white femininity (Collins, 2009; Meloy & Miller, 2009; Odem, 1992). Thus, for white women, there was heightened scrutiny regarding conformity to gender roles. This was evident when white women were portrayed as having fallen furthest from socially prescribed womanhood and into the evil woman narrative of violating the law and traditional gender roles. The degree of departure was communicated by inclusion or exclusion of the women's otherwise positive background – i.e. a good girl gone bad who could be saved or a failed woman with a history of nonconformity. For non-white women, however, nonconformity was communicated through perceptions of threat. The perceived dangerousness of the offender came through via journalists' emphasis on justice system outcomes which was most prominent for in articles about female sex offenders of Color. Though not explicit in the communication, the findings of this study reveal an implication

that women of Color have a predisposition for sex offending because they are less feminine than their white counterparts; and thus, require the punishment of the justice system. For female sex offenders of Color, then, media coverage seemingly perpetuates racial expectations of behavior. These portrayals and themes lend moderate support to the influence of the male perspective of journalism and the role it plays in the reinforcement of patriarchal ideologies in the media.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Informed by literature on social constructions of gender, female sex offenders, and media representations of race, crime, and gender, this dissertation takes an intersectional approach to understanding the covert and overt racial undertones used to describe female sex offenders in the media. Paying special attention to how those descriptions perpetuate patriarchal values and marginalization, this study posed the research questions: how are female sex offenders portrayed in the media, and how are those portrayals racialized? This dissertation finds that the top five circulating papers in Florida do not explicitly communicate racist messages but do seem to uphold white patriarchy in stories about female teachers who sexually victimize male students. Using a qualitative content analysis, this dissertation identifies three major themes in the media's portrayal of female sex offenders: 1) blameworthiness and accountability, 2) bourgeois standards of womanhood, and 3) threat and dangerousness.

Blameworthiness and accountability include subthemes that support a bad-mad dichotomy of female criminality (Ballinger, 1996). This discourse centers on the amount of offender culpability, which influences legal and social responses. For 'bad' women, newspaper coverage paid particular attention to how the offender encouraged the relationship through special attention, gift giving, and providing drugs or alcohol. Offenders portrayed as 'mad' women were provided a narrative that hinged on mental illness or other trauma. Interestingly, in this study, mad portrayals were exclusively

applied to white women. The exclusion of women of Color from the bad-mad binary means that women who are not white are painted, unilaterally, as bad women in need of punitive sanctions and control.

Traditional heteronormative sex scripts within our patriarchal society inform bourgeois standards of womanhood, or white femininity (Baca Zinn & Dill; Odem, 1992). In newspapers addressing the women's femininity, female sex offenders were bifurcated into depictions of either ideal or failed women. Coverage surrounding ideal or failed women focused on the offenders' perceived conformity to or departure from gendered expectations; including passivity, emotionality, domesticity, and white Westernized beauty. This dichotomy of womanhood is not unlike other polarizing versions of femininity, such as the Madonna/whore complex, which distinguishes women as either, saintly Madonnas or promiscuous whore's (Bareket, Kahalon, Shnabel, & Glick, 2018). These normalized depictions of womanhood are based on white women's femininity to suit the dominant male gaze; thus, the burden of conformity is largely carried by white women. For female sex offenders, newspapers' depictions reinforce patriarchal values by polarizing women into mutually exclusive categories -- Madonna/whore, ideal/failed — and, then, society interacts with women based on assumed traits of those categories (Bareket et al., 2018). Furthermore, within the context of teacher-student sexual relationships, women portrayed as “ideal Madonnas” were provided positive attributes to offset their criminal involvement. However, “failed women” and their rejection of chastity were painted in a negative light that communicated promiscuity and emotional nonchalance.

In this study, adherence to or rejection of bourgeois standards of womanhood was more prominent in stories about white female sex offenders than female sex offenders of Color, an imbalance that may be both a cause and effect of controlling images. Ignoring Black and Latina women's femininity is not only dehumanizing, it reinforces assumptions that women of Color are less feminine than white women. Furthermore, by stripping women who are not white of their femininity, media stories force consumers to replace traditional social expectations of women, generally, with ill-informed stereotypes about Black or Latina women, specifically. In other words, women's behavior becomes less about broad gender roles or sex scripts and more about racist assumptions of how "poorly" women of Color behave in relation to "proper" white women.

The theme of threat and dangerousness communicates to news readers the type of consequences that come to female sex offenders in teacher-student sex scandals. In this dissertation, newspaper content activates connections between the crime committed, the sanctions imposed on the woman, and the damages suffered by her victim. As prior literature suggests, these connections were largely reinforced through coverage of female sex offenders of Color (see Christensen, 2017). Perceptions of threat and dangerousness are not uncommon in male sex offender and media research (Zack et al., 2016), after all, the assumed visual of a sex offender is a man. In fact, with the exception of Christensen (2017), threat and dangerousness are largely overlooked and minimized for female sex offenders (Chiotti, 2009; Landor & Eisenclas, 2012; Zack et al., 2016). However, as the most reoccurring theme within stories of female sex offenders of Color, the racialization of threat and dangerousness serves as a testament to the media's role in perpetuating fear of crime committed by people of Color. Though fear of Black (or Brown-skinned) crime

is largely attributed to male offending, the perceived sexual insatiability of Latina and Black woman may specifically expand the fear to over-sexual women who prey upon underage boys.

In sum, through reports surrounding blameworthiness, femininity, and dangerousness this study revealed themes that apply a color-blind logic of media reporting to inherently gendered stories about female sex offenders. However, color-blindness is oxymoronic and its foundations are intrinsically racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Color-blind racism “creates a set of code terms that implicitly indict people of Color without ever mentioning race” (Heitzeg, 2015, p. 200). Without explicitly stating the race or ethnicity of the women, the articles in the current analysis reinforce assumptions about women’s behavior by including or excluding certain details when women of Color are the offenders compared to white offenders.

Implications

Messages being communicated by the mass media have implications beyond the information of the story. It influences the way people learn about and interact with the social world. Racialized and gendered messages shape public opinion, largely in ways that uphold white hetero-patriarchal ideals (Jackson, 2018). Public opinion, then, affects public policy and continues the cycle of reinforcing patriarchal values. However, in an evolving society where messages of marginalization are increasingly more covert than in years past, the present sample of articles includes implicit messages of gendered and racialized social roles. The three major themes examined here, each carry individual and overlapping social and legal implications.

First, the imbalance of bad-vs-mad narratives for women of Color communicates multiple messages. Exclusive application of mental illness or trauma as an excuse for white women's offending oppresses female offenders of Color by denying them an opportunity to explain away culpability and access more lenient correctional sanctions. Furthermore, research suggests that women of Color experience victimization at rates equal to or greater than their white counterparts (BJS, 2016). Thus, criminal coping in response to the trauma of victimization is just as valid for women of Color as for whites. However, the present findings reveal that narratives of being 'mad', which generally protect women from the harshness of the justice system and scorn of the public, are denied to women of Color. Madness, then, becomes a label of white privilege.

Female sex offending is correlated with prior victimization, abuse, or trauma (Vandiver, 2006), mitigating factors that would likely protect a white female offender. By ignoring actual "madness" of trauma and mental illness among women of Color, newspapers reinforce stigmas about mental illness and the invisibility of trauma within communities of Color (West, 1995). This is particularly damaging when the remaining 'bad' narrative carries the assumption of full accountability needing punishment. In terms of criminal justice, this is problematic because "madness" can be treated whereas badness is corrected. Not only are female sex offenders of Color denied the chivalrous protection associated with needing treatment for trauma but are presumed to be in need of especially harsh corrections. This contributes to outcomes in which female offenders of Color receive more punitive sanctions than white female offenders, perpetuating justice system inequalities. Additionally, discrediting mad offending narratives also poses significant barriers to social justice by further isolating women of Color from resources such as

mental healthcare and trauma or victimization services (Keating & Robertson, 2004). However, because there is an absence of connection between women of Color and “madness,” news consumers do not have to access to a narrative other than women of Color and “being bad.” This singular narrative is especially potent alongside entertainment media that provides stereotyped caricatures of non-white women (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Therefore, controlling images, which serve to justify marginalization and oppression, go unchallenged by alternative depictions and are consistently communicated and reinforced. Part of the singular view of women of Color can also be found in the increased attention to white women’s departure from normative femininity.

Extensive coverage of white female sex offenders draws attention to the homogeneity of the female sex offender overall. As shown in this study, white female offenders received exceedingly more coverage than Black or Latina offenders. Hypervisibility of these women may serve as a method of shame to further punish them in addition to formal legal sanctions. Hess and Waller (2014) argue that the media’s disciplinary power lies in its symbolic power. The news media represent a social institution charged with the authority to construct our reality of acceptable or deviant behavior (Couldry & Curran, 2003; Hess & Waller, 2014; van Dijk, 1988). The patriarchal hand of media frames stories about female sex offenders in a way that communicates a deviation from traditional gender roles. A particularly sacred gender expectation is the concept of virginity, especially white women’s virginity, and its value as the antithesis to promiscuity and hyper-sexuality. Such a polarized view of feminine expression reinforces the Madonna-whore complex that is so deeply rooted in patriarchal societies. In this study, an offender’s past experiences as an exotic dancer were

highlighted multiple times, despite it being prior to her employment as an educator and unrelated to the crime being discussed. The history of what many would call sex work positioned this specific woman in opposition to other female teachers convicted of similar crimes in the same area. The over-coverage of this particular case served to punish not only the sex offending incident but her exotic dancer history, as well.

The Madonna-whore dichotomy of women's behavior has significant implications for women's sexual agency and overall health (Bareket, Kahalon, Shnabel, & Glick, 2018). Through the Madonna-whore dichotomy, women's sexuality is defined within a rigid binary. As women internalize messages of femininity—including controlling images and being either a Madonna or a whore—sexual behavior is informed by what those labels mean and their social outcomes (Bareket et al., 2018; West, 1995). These binary restrictions on sexual identity also limit women's sexual agency and the identities that women feel are available to them based on sexual behavior. For example, 'Jezebels,' 'Cantina Girls' and 'whores' violate traditional gender roles through their assertive sexual expression. Sexual expression in a patriarchal society is limited to men's performance of hegemonic masculinity. When women are perceived to have too much sexual freedom it is perceived as a sexual threat to men, which is a direct threat to their masculinity (Bareket et al., 2018). As a result, public policy reflects men's fear of powerlessness through oppressive policing of women's bodies and inadequate resources towards women's health. Bodily oppression may be particularly applied to women of Color who, compared to white women, are portrayed in a more promiscuous light, have their fertility and sexuality controlled, and are more likely to have limited access to health services.

Inversely, and interestingly, messages in which women are portrayed as ideal and conforming to traditional gender roles may also perpetuate women's oppression and subordination. Glick and Fiske (2001) argue that good-bad, pedestal-gutter, Madonna-whore and other rigid binaries of womanhood communicate hostile sexism in opposition to positive depictions, or benevolent sexism. However, such positive depictions are actually a reflection of paternalistic prejudice where the dominant group utilizes positive traits to describe the subordinate group as justification for control. For example, men utilize generally positive attributes such as nurturing and helpful personality traits as justification for women's suitability in traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 2001); similar to whites utilization of a savior complex as justification for colonialism and slavery. By seemingly complimenting women's characteristics, patriarchal societies place 'good' women on a pedestal of superior femininity and regard these women as pure fragile beings who need the protection and support of a man (Glick & Fiske, 2001). This reinforces the suitability of women to roles situated within traditional sex scripts and perpetuates chivalrous-paternalistic ideas that protect some women and oppress others. In other words, women who conform to traditional, patriarchal sex scripts experience benevolent sexism in the way of chivalrous treatment and paternalistic protections—such as lenient correctional sanctions (Embry & Lyons, 2012)—on the other hand, women who reject patriarchal conformity and are perceived to threaten men's power are labeled as evil women (Koons-Witt, 2002) and receive harsher social and legal outcomes (Glick & Fiske, 2001). In sum, discourse that focuses on expressions of femininity, whether positive or negative, is damaging to women's equality by limiting performance of

womanhood to mutually exclusive, unrealistic dichotomies that protect men's social dominance.

Similarly, white fear, specifically white fear of being victimized by a racial 'other', leads to more social and legal sanctions imposed on individuals and communities of Color (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Heitzeg, 2015). Heightened attention being drawn to perceived dangerousness of female sex offenders of Color reinforces long standing beliefs that Black and Latinx people are dangerous (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Furthermore, under the guise of public opinion, white fear has far reaching consequences on disparate criminal justice outcomes. News framing, the process through which the media promote certain interpretations by prioritizing some facts and excluding others guides viewers to draw conclusions and construct realities that uphold patriarchy (Dowler, 2006; Entman, 1993; Everbach & Floumoy, 2007; Tuchman, 1978). In the case of this newspaper analysis, the public is essentially being told how to feel about female sex offenders, women who have doubly violated society through criminal behavior and deviation from traditionally prescribed gender roles. For female sex offenders of Color, especially those in nurturing positions of authority, racialized perceptions of threat and dangerousness could lead to discriminatory hiring practices or particularly harsh social controls (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002).

Mass media outlets inform cultural norms and public opinion (Andersen et al., 2018) and like other social institutions, is touched and influenced by patriarchal ideologies. The messages being communicated to the public are filtered through a lens of male power and privilege (Everbach & Flournoy, 2007). As a result, news media has a newsworthiness preference of male offenders and female victims (Humphries, 2009).

News frames help consumers decipher information about offenders and victims and the appropriate response towards those involved. Additionally, the media preference of women as victims ironically reinforces both paternalistic views that women are in constant danger and in need of men's protection and rape culture. However, that also means that the media may minimize male victimization and women's offending overall.

Prior research has found an aura of sympathy for older female-younger male sex cases in the media compared to the disdain towards older male-younger female cases (Chiotti, 2009; Dollar, Perry, Fromuth, & Holt, 2004; Fromuth & Holt, 2008; Landor & Eisenclas, 2012). Though this content analysis finds some discussion of effects on the male victim, these findings appear to be an outlier in the broader literature examining female sex offenders in the media. As patriarchy serves to reinforce attitudes of (white) male superiority and female inferiority, the dominant-subordinate dynamic between men and women is interwoven in most social interactions. Sex and violence are two of the primary displays of that relationship dynamic. Men conceptualize their dominance, and overall masculinity, through (hetero) sexual conquests and physical superiority over women and other men (Diamonduros, Cosentino, Tysinger, & Tysinger, 2012). It then follows that sex and violence are independent and interwoven aspects of gender performance for men. These values are reflected in news coverage of sex crimes. Sex crime coverage is presented in a way that reflects the reality that journalists are mostly white men (Benedict, 1992). The meeting of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, here, may translate to newspapers largely minimizing male victimhood and making sexual victimization of boys taboo in the absence of more wide spread moral panics, such as a perceived epidemic of female teachers engaging in sexual intercourse with their teenage

male students. The present study, originally inspired by this line of research, drives the literature forward by highlighting the unpredictable narrative of female sex offenders with male victims. When considering the social commentary of “boys will be boys,” and the emphasis on sexual exploration for adolescent boys, male victims of sex crimes are silenced in favor of rhetoric that not only blames them for their own victimization but varies in the level of accountability placed upon the perpetrator. Thus, one of the underlying goals of qualitative research—providing a voice to research participants who may otherwise be voiceless—is somewhat realized in this project by devoting substantial attention to a hidden, often-ignored offender population (i.e. female sex offenders) and shedding light on the associated victim population (i.e. male teenage victims of female sex offenders).

In addition to the larger social implications regarding female sex offenders, this study also highlights the salience of media discourse, especially alleged color-blindness in media (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Modern day media do not use terms that blatantly draw readers’ attention to race and/or gender. The use of photos alongside news stories actually makes explicit identifying language unnecessary. Instead it is the messages camouflaged within the words of the article that inform the reader of the race, ethnicity, and/or gender of the news stories’ cast and characters and provide cues on how these people should be perceived. This coded language activates associations between race, gender, offenders, and victims even in the absence of visual prompts. (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Though the present findings do not relay racist messages explicitly, they certainly communicate hetero-patriarchal ideas that serve the “dominant gaze” (Russell, 1991) and the “male gaze” (Mulvey, 1975) and dictate public perceptions and policy, including racialized and

gendered criminal justice policy. Covert messages of racism and sexism communicate patriarchal ideas that go relatively unnoticed until their consequences manifest in increasingly heavy oppressive outcomes. As stereotypes are communicated, recycled, and repeated they are engrained in the minds of media consumers as normal and true. This informs inter-group interactions, public policy, self-esteem, and group identity (Goffman, 1963). As media discourse influences and is influenced by social shifts in equality and equity, intersectional scholarship maintains that such changes will continue to have unequal effects on communities of Color and further marginalize members of those communities, especially women of Color.

Limitations

The current study is not without its limitations. The data available—newspaper articles—limits the sample by filtering social phenomena through a frame of newsworthiness. Galeste and colleagues (2012) deal with similar limitations in their study of sex offenders in print media noting that news stories go through an intricate process from the time the incident occurs until the dissemination of the story. The ‘selection bias’ in news story selection is influenced by the male-dominated hand of media and journalism, which reflects male interests, priorities, and values (Everbach & Flournoy, 2007; Steiner, 2012). Therefore, the women chosen for this study, and in turn their coverage, are a reflection of the decision processes of media and the availability of comparable coverage. Future studies would do well to incorporate other media sources such as television outlets and social media-based sources. Expanding to more technology-based sources may capture different views than those represented in print media. Furthermore, internet-based media sources may provide a wider range of female sex

offender portrayals considering the wider reach of the World Wide Web compared to state newspapers. Internet and mobile sources may also be written to communicate to a younger demographic of readers versus the more traditional newspaper. That is, the target audience likely influences the values being communicated because different age groups of media consumers may maintain varying degrees of hegemonic perspectives.

The methods for selecting women into the case study may also suffer from bias. The relatively homogenous make-up of female sex offenders is likely to be an obstacle for any subsequent intersectional analysis of female sex offenders. The use of the Florida sex offender registry to select women of Color by county certainly restricts the women available to be selected into the study. Future research should expand search parameters for finding women of Color in the registry, such as using the entire state registry for a statewide analysis or, inversely, focusing the study to one county's registered offenders and local media outlets. For example, a future expansion of this dissertation might consider Tampa-based newspapers' (Tampa Tribune and Tampa Bay Times) coverage of all female sex offenders in Hillsborough County.

Another limitation of the study is the women in this study received substantially unequal media coverage. For example, the frequency with which the Stephanie Ragusa and Christina Butler cases were covered in the Tampa-based sources may speak to the way the media over-report individual high-profile incidents and contribute to moral panics (Galeste et al., 2012). This shortcoming may be remedied with previously mentioned sampling strategies for registered offenders and the media sources being examined. However, it is worth noting that the geographical and temporal relation of Stephanie Ragusa and Christina Butler's cases in 2007 and 2008, coupled with the recent

culmination of the Debra Lafave case in 2006, all in Hillsborough County middle schools, lends itself to a perceived epidemic of female teachers being sexually involved with students. The social construction of the prevalence of female sex offenders and the moral panic of teachers victimizing students supports sex offender myths and leads to distorted reactions by the public—including over-reporting in newspapers (Galeste et al., 2012). In other words, the difference in the amount of coverage may simply be a reflection of a moral panic within Hillsborough County, or Tampa generally, as opposed to a sampling weakness.

Lastly, while not a weakness of the study, reflexivity and positionality are central to qualitative data collection and analysis. Thus, researcher effects of this study should also be noted. The use of a qualitative content analysis is largely dependent upon individual interpretations of data. While this study is confident in the efforts made to maximize validity of the findings, the possibility that other researchers may or may not differ in their interpretation of the same data is important. These effects may be particularly salient in light of my positionality as a Black female researcher. Coded messages in media are only visible to those primed to receive them (Jackson, 2018). Therefore, it cannot be assumed, for example, that a white male researcher would interpret the data in the same way even if he were to also employ intersectional frameworks.

Additional opportunities for future research include comparative studies with male and female sex offenders. As other studies have found different attitudes for male sex offenders and female sex offenders (Chiotti, 2009; Dollar et al., 2004; Fromuth & Holt, 2008; Landor & Eisnechlas, 2012), to date no other studies have employed

intersectional frameworks to examine sex offenders or their victims, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. Also, the present study focused on Florida offenders and Florida newspapers. Future studies should examine states with different levels of racial and ethnic diversity, as well as sociocultural values. For example, a state with ideologies more firmly rooted in racial or gendered oppression may have media sources that are less implicit in the discourse used in news reporting. On the other hand, states with more egalitarian or liberal values may have news outlets that are more egalitarian in their story coverage.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the primary research questions: how are female sex offenders portrayed in the media, and how are those portrayals racialized? Generally, female sex offenders are depicted within narratives that address accountability for the crime, the danger she poses to the community, and her perceived adherence to dominant culture expectations of femininity; findings similar to those in other analyses of female criminality (Dollar et al., 2004). What this study specifically contributes is an intersectional look at what information is included and excluded in the stories of female sex offenders and the messages being communicated. Even in the absence of explicit language, messages are raced and gendered and help to maintain expectations of women, generally, and women of Color, specifically. Though female sex offenders account for only about one percent of all sex offenders and female sex offenders of Color represent an even smaller population, prevalence is not an indication of research merit. Similarly, shifts away from overtly racialized and gendered messages in the public sphere are not a reflection of neither ‘post-racial’ nor egalitarian beliefs.

Media discourse has been coded in accordance with changing social norms surrounding racial equality and gender equity. Whether it is explicitly stated or implicitly communicated, social and cultural messages being received from the media provide information people use to construct their worldview. The resulting narratives inform public opinion, and in turn, influence public policy. The findings here do not suggest that the specific articles within this study are directly influencing policy. Instead, it is the messages within the articles reinforcing ideas that are repeatedly being communicated elsewhere in a multitude of forms, from a variety of sources. It is the convergence of these messages over time and their entrenchment in social values and social identity that makes the words between the lines of modern newspapers important. Unfortunately, despite social strides towards equality, the media continues to reinforce marginalization through nuanced repetitions of controlling images. Media sources must diversify their decision makers at all levels to reflect the multiple identities represented among the public. Then, changes can be made in the values being communicated — changes in values, changes in social structure, and changes towards social justice for marginalized populations.

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