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What You See is What They Want You to See: South African Newspaper Constructions of Female Offenders

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I hereby declare that I have read and understood the regulations governing the submission of MPhil in Criminology, Law and Society dissertations, including those relating to length and plagiarism, as contained in the rules of this University, and that this dissertation/ research paper conforms to those regulations.

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ABSTRACT

Key words: Media and crime, female offenders, media portrayals, sensationalism, gender stereotyping

Although female-perpetrated crime is a significant minority of overall crime statistics, the media are ready to capitalise on these stories and often resort to sensationalist reporting which results in the misrepresentation of female criminality. Many researchers have highlighted how the media portrays woman offenders and their stories and the effects of such portrayals, however, this has not been done in South Africa. This study aimed to identify how South African newspapers construct female perpetrators and how this may change across different crime types. Thematic analysis was applied to a sample of 160 newspaper articles covering the stories of 24 female offenders representing four different crime types. It was found that South African newspapers used at least 10 different narratives to depict women in conflict with the law. Additionally, it was found that South African newspapers sensationalised the stories of female offenders of violent crimes and crimes against children more than perpetrators of financial and drug-related crimes. The study concludes that South African newspapers reinforce gender-role stereotyping and perpetuate the misrepresentation of female offenders thereby influencing news consumers' perceptions and beliefs about female criminality.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Crime news comprises a significant segment of the combined media output (Surette, 2011:201). A core task of the media is filtering and creating the stories that are to be presented (Dowler, Fleming, & Muzatti, 2006:839; Marsh & Melville, 2019:1; Wong & Harraway, 2020:333). Media houses assume different approaches in their filtering processes and are prone to exaggerated and sensationalist reporting for the goal of gaining readership, which boosts media ratings, and increases sales (Barak, 1998:569; Jewkes, 2015:46; Ngange & Elempia, 2019:1; Wong & Harraway, 2020:336). Often this leads to the misrepresentation of the problem of crime (Dowler et al, 2006:839; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:61-62; Greer, 2010:201-202; Newburn, 2017:82; Marsh & Melville, 2019:255,259; Ngange & Elempia, 2019:1).

Crime news media filter and select stories that are deemed newsworthy based on specific criteria which are considered to be of public appeal and interest (Chibnall, 1977:13; Greer, 2007:26; Jewkes, 2015:45) and capitalise on these stories. Current socio-political ideologies shape what is newsworthy and what is not (Chibnall,1977:ix; Barak, 1998:573-576; Pollak & Kubrin, 2007: 60; Jewkes, 2015:68; Marsh & Melville, 2019:554-55). The fact that crime news stories are specifically selected by the media implies that news reporting is not impartial. Because most people receive their information about crime through the media (Wong & Harraway, 2020:333), the media has the power to influence what people know about crime such as its prevalence, pervasiveness, and its demographic composition (Happer & Philo, 2013:328; Collins, 2016:297). The stories the media present about crime and criminality essentially form the foundation for people's construction of their social realities (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:59). When consumers of news media are proffered a one-sided perspective, they are restricted in their ability to develop informed perceptions, judgements, and attitudes about events that are reported (Happer & Phillo, 2013; Boudana, 2016; Marsh & Melville, 2019).

While impartiality, as a journalistic principle, has been debated in the scholarly literature (Dowler et al, 2006; Happer & Phillo, 2013; Marsh & Melville, 2019:), British broadcast news has made impartiality a legal requirement (Wallace, 2013:64). In contrast, it is not

required by law in South African news media and journalism. The Code of Ethics and Conduct for South African Print and Online Media states that media shall be truthful, accurate, and fair in its reporting; should not intentionally misrepresent or distort facts; and must disclose when information is based on rumours, opinions, or allegations (The Press Council of SA, online). Unfortunately, membership is not obligatory and not all print and online media houses are registered with the council. For this reason, The Press Council of SA's regulatory powers is limited in addressing the issues of impartiality and bias in South African media. This may create the risk of one-sided news reporting that represents the values of the political and social status quo in South Africa, leading to questions about the accuracy of crime news in SA. Of particular interest in this dissertation is the issue of gender bias, particularly in the construction of female offenders in South African crime news.

Women's involvement in crime has increasingly become a topic of academic discourse. Scholars have noted that females commit fewer crimes than males and that for the most part, they are implicated in less serious offences (Burman, 2003:41; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013:97; Nafinne, 2016:1). However, in South Africa, studies have indicated that women engage in serious crimes including violent, economic, sexual, and drug-related crimes (Artz, Hoffman-Wanderer, & Moult, 2012; Jules-Macquet, 2014:8; Steyn & Booyens, 2017).

On the African continent, women represented 3.4 per cent of the prison population in 2017, the lowest number globally (Walmsly's, 2017).[1] In 2019 female offenders constituted 2.64 per cent of the entire prison population in South Africa (Department of Correctional Services (DCS), 2019:46). While South Africa has one of the highest incarceration rates recorded in the world (World Population View, 2020), its female inmate population is lower than the global and continental average.

This is important because this data is available to the public, yet as already stated, most people receive their information about crime through the media which may offer biased

[1] Europe and Asia indicated 6.1 and 6.7 per cent respectively, while Oceania revealed a 7.4 per cent female inmate population and the America's disclose that female prisoners account for 8.4 per cent of their prison population.

and inaccurate pictures of the reality of female offending. South African news consumers might, consequently, over- or underestimate the problem of female criminality either in its pervasiveness or prevalence.

As female-perpetrated crimes are considered uncommon events, representing a significant minority of overall crime, they are considered more newsworthy and the media is primed to capitalise on these stories (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002:69; Noh, Lee & Fetley, 2010:111,127; Skilbrei, 2012:140; Jewkes, 2015:143). Research has delved into the media's constructions of female offenders to gain insight into the gendered nature of crime news reporting and the concomitant perpetuation of gender stereotyping. While many authors have identified specific narratives employed by the media, Jewkes (2015) highlighted eight specific, and sometimes interrelated, narratives which include 'sexuality and sexual deviance', 'physical attractiveness' or the absence thereof, 'bad wives', 'bad mothers', 'mythical monsters', 'evil manipulators', 'mad cows', and women as 'non-agents'. To date, there has been no academic assessment of the use of Jewkes' findings in print media, nor has there been an investigation into the applicability of these narratives to varying crime typologies either internationally, or in South Africa.

There is no current or available peer-reviewed literature emanating from South Africa, or that places South African crime news constructions of female offenders at the centre of their investigations. Researchers have limited their studies to a small set of narratives, most often, 'mad', 'bad', and 'sad', that the media use to portray female offenders thereby omitting (purposefully or unintentionally) other possible narratives. Most studies have focussed on females' aggressive and sexual offending. However, women commit many types of crimes including drug-related crimes and economic crimes, yet we know nothing of how the media constructs these offenders. These narrow foci have resulted in an extremely limited conversation on the issue of female criminality and how it is represented in the media.

This dissertation aims to fill this gap by exploring how the South African print media portrays female offenders of various types of crime. In doing so, the study aims to identify the narratives South African newspapers use to construct their stories about female offenders and to identify which narratives are used for specific types of crime. Based on

a thematic analysis of 160 media articles from major print newspapers in South Africa, this dissertation asks:

i. Are Jewkes' eight narratives reflected in South African newspaper constructions of female offenders?
ii. What other narratives are used to portray female offenders?
iii. Is there a difference in how these narratives are applied to female offenders (either based on the type of crime or their race/ethnicity)?

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation constitutes six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces a broad outline of the study and provides the rationale and aims of the research.

Chapter 2 outlines the role of the media in crime news reporting by considering issues around newsworthiness and sensationalism. It also explores existing literature on the issue of media constructions of female offenders.

Chapter 3 explains the study's methodology (design and methods) outlining the unit of analysis, sampling strategy, data collection, and data analysis processes. The research limitations and ethical considerations are also put forward here.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the thematic analysis including the identified narratives and how these are applied differently to four different crime categories.

Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the findings as presented in Chapter 4. Excerpts from the raw data are used to demonstrate how South African newspapers use the narratives in a variety of ways to construct female offenders and their crimes.

Chapter 6 considers the implications of South African newspapers' constructions of female offenders and offers recommendations for further research The paper concludes by discussing its contribution to the expansion of the academic literature on the topic.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Significant academic attention has been given to the issue of media and crime over the past century. These conversations have focussed mainly on factors such as newsworthiness, sensationalism, and the media's constructions of crime and offenders. These are inevitably entwined and must each be given due consideration when talking about how the media portrays female offenders.

2.1. Newsworthiness

A key driving force behind any news media outlet is profit (Barak, 1998:569; Marsh & Melville, 2019:262; Ngange & Elempia, 2019:1) and there is inherent competitiveness in the media as each media house seeks to publish their articles first (Bernstein, 1992:24). Concern has been expressed over what is considered as the media's preoccupation with speed and quantity rather than thoroughness and quality and accuracy and context in news reporting (Bernstein, 1992:24). To keep up with the competitive pace, journalists need to be selective in what they publish, and they may resort to a sensationalist style of reporting to maintain readership and generate profit.

Before a story can be sensationalised, it must be considered newsworthy enough to publish. To determine the story's newsworthiness, certain criteria known as 'news values' must be met which include violence, social status, simplification, individualisation or personalisation, proximity and cultural relevance, graphic imagery, sex, crimes involving children, and novelty of the crime (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:53; Chibnall, 1977; Greer, 2007; Allan, 2010; Jewkes, 2015:46). News values may differ across mediums such as broadcast and print media and among different newspaper and broadcasting houses (Chibnall, 1977:13), as well as across countries and cultures (Jewkes, 2015:48; Greer, 2007:28). Additionally, changes in the social construction of acceptable behaviours may influence the newsworthiness of an event or story over time (Greer, 2007:28). It is the deviance from these socially constructed norms that may qualify an event as newsworthy (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:59). For example, stories of paedophilia, child pornography, and

ritual child abuse are far more newsworthy than so-called ‘typical’ sex crimes and abuses (Jewkes, 2015:67). Similarly, when children are the offenders of serious crimes such as physical and sexual abuse, and mass shootings for example. Notions of innocence are challenged, and the news media will construct these children as evil, monsters, and demons (Jewkes, 2015:67-68). If either of these examples is accompanied by the involvement of a high-status person or celebrity and graphic photographs are available, their newsworthiness increases exponentially. Journalists will also predict that there will be a trial that will allow for follow-up articles thereby rendering the story particularly newsworthy as this will result in attracting news consumers as they seek to follow the progress of the story and ultimately increase sales (Jewkes, 2015:46,68).

By selecting stories that reflect one or more of these news values, the media shapes the information that is received by its consumers. The complex nature of crime is dismissed altogether, and critical details may be omitted thereby limiting the public’s ability to make informed judgements (Jewkes, 2015:53). The reasons that some stories are considered more newsworthy than others provide insight into the subtlety of media bias in their reporting of crime, criminals, and victims.

2.2. Sensationalism

How the media selects and creates the stories it reports contributes significantly to the social construction of the perceived reality of society (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:60; Wong & Harraway, 2020:335). Media largely influences society’s knowledge about crime, and it is well known that crime reports in the media exaggerate the prevalence of crime and present a skewed version of the reality of crime, criminality, and victimisation (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:61-62; Newburn, 2017:82). This type of exaggeration resulting in misrepresentation and fear of crime is sensationalism, which is defined as “a characteristic of the news packaging process that emphasises those elements [of the story] that could provoke an effect on the human sensory system” (Uribe & Gunter, 2007:209). For example, in print media, sensationalism is observed in outrageous headlines and the choice of pictures for inclusion in the story which arouse an emotive response (Ngange & Elempia, 2019:2). Sensationalism is deeply ingrained in journalistic

practice which places great emphasis on unusual, uncommon, and dramatic events to the extent that their statistical importance is inflated (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009:102,107). Arguments have been made that it is this misinformation and misrepresentation of crime that has exacerbated the fear of crime in turn sparking conversations regarding media exposure and fear of crime.[2] Authors like Ditton, Chadee, Farrall, Gilchrist, and Bannister (2004) have suggested that it is not necessarily a matter of how much exposure people have to crime media, but rather, the connection lies in how people interpret the news they receive (Ditton, Chadee, Farrall, Gilchrist, & Bannister, 2004:607-608). This is an important finding as it highlights the critical issue of sensationalist news reporting and its impact on fear of crime.

Pollak and Kubrin's (2007) investigation into how newspapers and television news constructed the same crimes highlights the use of sensational phrases and statements to captivate audiences. In this study, violent crimes were exaggerated in both news mediums and offered a warped sense of the prevalence of such crimes (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:69). Interestingly, studies have shown that broadcast news - especially local television crime news - has a greater impact on consumers' fear of crime than newspaper reports on crime (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:78; Kohm, Waide-Lindeberg, Weinrath, O'Connor Shelley, & Dobbs, 2012:83).

A study of the impact of sensationalist newspaper crime reporting in three Hong Kong newspapers revealed that university students exposed to a more sensational type of news reporting have less awareness of the reality of crime and exhibit higher levels of fear of crime (Zhu, Krever, & Choi, 2018:476, 478). Conversely, readers of less sensational crime news reports hold higher awareness of crime and less fear of crime (Zhu et al., 2018:478). These findings suggest that how newsprint media frames its stories impact its consumers' awareness of the reality of crime thereby influencing the fear of crime (Zhu et al., 2018:478).

[2] Since Stanley Cohen's 1973 *Folk devils and moral panics: the creation of the Mods and Rockers,* researchers have tried to either prove or disprove the causal link between media and the fear of crime. Ditton, Chadee, Farrall, Gilchrist, & Bannister (2004) outline some of this research in their paper.

How reporters construct their stories, consequently, has an emotive impact on people's perceptions of crime. While fear of crime is an important issue, this should not overshadow the other effects of sensational reporting. Apart from distorting the prevalence of crime and promoting fear of crime, sensationalist reporting misrepresents facts about who commits a crime and what motivates crime. The aim of sensational reporting is then not necessarily to stimulate fear, but rather to perpetuate stereotyping which may subsequently impact fear of certain crimes or certain 'types' of people.

2.3. Media Constructions of Female Offenders

A significant amount of academic literature exists on the topic of female offenders and their portrayal in the media. Studies have covered various media types such as broadcast media (crime drama series, documentaries, and newscasts), print media, and online platforms. Academic discourse is dispersed across different female criminal offence types (intimate partner violence, sex offences, mothers who kill, co-offending women) offender types (sole offender and co-offender), and race and ethnicity when reporting on female offenders.

Grabe, Trager, Lear and Rauch (2006), Brennan and Vanderberg (2009) and Collins (2016) conducted quantitative content analyses of newspaper articles reporting on crimes committed by males and females to assess how they were treated in the US media.[3] Two studies found that the media treated female offenders more harshly than violent male offenders (Grabe, Trager, Lear; & Rauch, 2006:148-150; Collins, 2016:306). Brennan and Vanderberg (2009:153-154) revealed that female offenders in American news media were described unfavourably, and guilt was automatically assumed in the majority of the reports. Furthermore, woman offenders were also more likely than their male counterparts to make headlines, front-page news, and be covered in leading articles (Grabe et al, 2006:150). Little attention is given to female offenders' occupations compared to males, their crimes are not rationalised as often, they are characterised as less violent than men, and their economic disadvantage was frequently mentioned (Collins, 2016:305). These

[3] Grabe et al. (2006), and Brennan & Vanderberg (2009) focussed on American newspaper stories while Collins (2016) directed the research to Canadian newspapers.

three articles described the discrepancies in media reporting of male and female offenders. It also showed that the presentation of certain factual information was not consistent among these two populations thereby demonstrating bias in crime news reporting.

Berrington and Honkatukia (2002) studied media constructions of two female offenders to explore how the media portrays female killers. Two female perpetrators in their study were representative of different nationalities, motives, and *modus opperandi*. One of the offenders and her male accomplice were convicted of the murder of ten young girls while the other acted alone when she shot four men (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002:50). Through their comparative analysis of the newspaper reports, the authors illustrated how the media used different techniques to construct women by employing emotive and image-evoking language as well as photographs of the women, emphasising their sexuality, physical appearance, mental states, and background histories (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002:69). This study demonstrated that the way female offenders are portrayed differs across cultures and countries, offence types, and whether they acted alone or with an accomplice. It also showed that the media consistently misrepresents the facts and sensationalises the story which ultimately has long-lasting effects on how the public perceives female offenders.

Intimate Partner Violence

Several content analysis studies have examined the media's portrayal of women who commit intimate partner violence (IPV) homicides (Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010; Noh et al., 2010; Carlyle, Scarduzio, & Slater, 2014; Pelvin, 2019). Pelvin (2019:393) comments on the relatively low news coverage of female-perpetrated IPV homicide. There also seems to be little difference in the amount of coverage when comparing male and female perpetrators (Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010:944). Pelvin (2019:363) argues that this is perhaps because these stories are not as sensationalised as other female-perpetrated crimes. However, when the media does report on women's involvement in homicide stemming from IPV, they cite an escalation of arguments, as well as financial strains, as precipitating the event (Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010:944; Carlyle et al., 2014:2410;

Pelvin, 2019:364). Self-defence and past abuse at the hands of their intimate partners were also used to minimise responsibility for the fatal act. (Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010:947; Noh et al., 2010:120; Carlyle et al., 2014:2410). On the contrary, in some cases, women were portrayed as fully rational actors who are 'bad', thereby rendering them wholly accountable for their actions with any history of mental health problems or abuse being side-lined (Noh et al., 2010:120,126; Carlyle et al., 2014:2410-2411; Pelvin, 2019:365). These negative narratives are, however, presented less frequently than those that have a more sympathetic tone (Carlyle et al., 2014:2410; Pelvin, 2019:365).

The overarching theme in these studies is that females who kill their romantic partners are not representations of the typical woman, but are women who were pushed over the edge due to extenuating circumstances such as financial troubles, escalation of arguments, and self-defence (Noh et al., 2010:120; Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010:944; Carlyle et al., 2014:2410; Pelvin, 2019:364). This type of narrative reinforces the notion of the 'ideal' woman thereby promoting traditional stereotypes of femininity. In a few cases, women were portrayed as 'bad' and condemned for not conforming to society's construction of the 'ideal' good woman (Noh et al., 2010:125; Carlyle et al., 2014:2411; Pelvin, 2019:350). Gender-embedded stereotyping, therefore, continues to be an issue in today's crime news reporting.

Female Sex Offenders

Female sex offenders have received a lot of attention in academic discourse. Studies have investigated the narratives used in the media's reporting of these perpetrators (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Christensen, 2018). Two of the three content analysis studies discussed here offer similar themes while the other reports contradictory results. This is likely because the studies emanate from different geographical regions.[4]

[4] Australia (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012); Australia and England (Hayes & Baker, 2014); England, Ireland, Wales, United States of America, Canada, and New Zealand (Christensen, 2018).

Four themes emerge from these studies: romanticising the offence, emphasising mitigating circumstances, describing the offender as a ‘non-agent’, and demonising the perpetrator. In the first instance, female sex offenders and their victims are often portrayed as lovers and the relationship between the two is described as “illicit affairs”, “the couple”, and “the pair” (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012:495; Hayes & Baker, 2014:6). Such narratives imply that the responsibility of these women in positions of authority is minimised and the seriousness of the consequences for their victims is trivialised (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012:496). Other ways in which the offenders’ actions are downplayed include when the media highlights physical and mental health problems such as menopause, depression, and loneliness (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012:492, 495, 497-498; Hayes & Baker, 2014:6). The media also constructs female perpetrators as non-agents who are passive and subordinate, or victims of coercion by a co-offending male (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012:498-497; Hayes & Baker, 2014:6). In these cases, the media seems to deny the possibility of a sexually seductive instigator and shifts the blame either to her co-offender or the victim (Hayes & Baker, 2014:6).

In contrast to these findings, Hayes and Baker acknowledge that there are cases in which female sex offenders are demonised for their crimes as they are seen as defying socially constructed gender roles (Hayes & Baker, 2014:5). This holds true for the cases presented in Christensen’s (2018) study of print media reports across six different countries where the media used very harsh and unsympathetic undertones when describing women who commit sexual crimes against children. Words such as “cold”, “unsympathetic”, “paedophiles” and “predators” were used and the negative impact on the victims was emphasised (Christensen, 2018:182-184). Additionally, females who co-offended in the commission of sexual crimes were portrayed as active and willing participants and not as submissive and coerced meek women (Christensen, 2018:187).

The discrepancy in the results presented by these authors may be attributed to the fact that Christensen’s study covered a wider geographical range of print media reports compared to Landor and Eisenchlas, and Hayes & Baker. Despite these differences, gender stereotyping was consistent across these studies. The narratives employed by the media, whether sympathetic or unforgiving, infer that ‘normal’ women are not capable of such egregious acts. For a woman to commit such a crime, there must be something

wrong with her, either mentally or physically (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012; Hayes & Baker, 2014), or she is just ‘bad’ (Christensen, 2018).

Mothers who kill

When women kill their children, the media pays great attention. Researchers have homed in on this to examine the differences in media narratives about mothers and fathers who kill their children, as well as to examine ethnic and religious differences in this reporting. Compared to female offenders of other crimes, some interesting narratives appear in the context of mothers who kill their children. Factors such as ethnicity and religion, socio-economic status, age, and marital status appear to be important factors when constructing narratives around these women. The gender discrepancy between mothers and fathers who kill their children is also noteworthy.

Two qualitative content analysis studies reported that young age, low socio-economic status, and poor mental health are used to portray women who kill their children as fragile or to imply that these are mitigating factors in their offences (Cavaglion, 2008:276; Saavedra & Oliveira, 2017:348). However, this is not the case for women from minority groups, especially married women of such groups (Cavaglion, 2008:277; Saavedra & Oliveira, 2017:349). This is an important finding as it brings to light the differences in the social construction of women across different cultures and religions. But more critically, it demonstrates the stereotyping of women of different cultural and religious backgrounds. The perpetuation of the racial divide is highlighted in these studies where there is still a notable intolerance of ‘the other’.

When women who kill their children are not depicted as fragile, the media may turn to dehumanising them and construct them as perverse and ‘bad’ regardless of their socio-economic standing or mental health problems (Cavaglion, 2008:266-277; Saavedra & Oliveira, 2017:348). Emphasis is also placed on the mother’s substance abuse, sexual orientation and associated behaviours (Niblock, 2018:2461). However, in cases where there is a breakdown in the intimate relationship between a woman and her partner, the ‘fragility’ narrative is discarded in favour of descriptions of vengeful ex-wives who kill their

children in retaliation for their (ex) husbands' newfound happiness after the divorce; or with reference to failed maternal instincts (Niblock, 2018:2461).

In studying the discrepancies between newspaper portrayals of mothers and fathers who kill their children in the United Kingdom, Niblock (2018) highlighted newspaper journalists' consistently constructing fathers who commit filicide as doting fathers who snap because of financial pressures, their wives' infidelities, and the threat or reality of divorce (Niblock, 2018:2458-2460). One particular case also referred to the mental health of a father whose wife had forgotten to secure an appointment with his doctor (Niblock, 2018:2460). Niblock noted that this representation of men who kill their children mitigates their guilt and in turn shifts the blame to their wives or partners, despite evidence of the man's abusive or criminal history (Niblock, 2018:2459, 2463). On the contrary, mothers who commit filicide are portrayed in vastly negative narratives, consistent with findings by Grabe et al. (2006) and Collins (2016). When mental illness is mentioned in relation to mothers who kill their children, it is not to offer a form of mitigation, but rather, to divert the attention to the failures of health professionals and social workers to intervene (Niblock, 2018:2462).

Gendered stereotyping is, therefore, embedded in media reporting of offenders where women are persistently set up against socially constructed perceptions of the 'ideal' woman and mother. Regardless of religious or cultural affiliation, motherhood is consistently exemplified by a caring and nurturing woman. When she kills her child(ren), a woman becomes the ultimate deviation from society's expectations and the media searches for a narrative that tries to make sense of her actions.

Co-offenders

Gender disparities are most evident for women who commit crimes alongside male partners. These women are presented as passive women who are coerced by partners, or as rational women who are fully responsible for their roles in the crime (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Christensen, 2018).

To investigate this discrepancy, Evans (2012) conducted a qualitative discourse analysis of newspaper articles and documentaries covering the cases of Vanessa George and

Colin Blanchard, and Maxine Carr and Ian Huntley. In the newsprint media, Vanessa George's role as a caregiver and wife was referred to more often than her actual name, thereby stripping her of her individuality (Evans, 2012:12). More attention was given to her conventional lifestyle which was characterised as contrasting the offences she committed (Evans, 2012:15). Vanessa George was demonised and ostracised and the media treated her more harshly than they did her male co-offender, a finding that supports those of Grabe et al. (2006:148-150) and Collins (2016:306). In terms of Maxine Carr and Ian Huntly, less media attention was given to Carr's involvement in the crime as opposed to Huntly (Evans, 2012:13). However, in some instances, when Carr was featured, the newsprint media made efforts to portray her as cold and emphasised her negative character (Evans, 2012:14). In contrast, the documentary about Carr described her as a victim of Huntly thereby presenting her as passive and a non-agent in the crime. The contrasting depictions of Carr across these two mediums suggest that not all media forms conform to "patriarchal perceptions of femininity" (Evans, 2012:17). The difference between how newspapers and documentaries portray female offenders can be accounted for by the amount of detail that can be contained in these two mediums. Newspapers are extremely limited in what they can print, whereas documentaries may involve the gathering of more interviews with people involved in the cases and can provide more in-depth information.

Evan's study showed that there are discrepancies across reporting styles and mediums, as well as in the narratives used to portray female offenders when they commit crimes alongside men. While some female offenders were held fully accountable for their actions and ostracised for not fitting society's expectations of women's behaviour, others were portrayed as typical meek and passive women who were easily coerced into crime by domineering males. Although coming to different conclusions, both characterisations were based on societal constructions of femininity.

Race and Ethnicity

The media presents a distorted version of the racial composition of the female offender population by over-reporting the offences committed by people of colour and

underreporting the crimes of white women (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Slakoff, 2020; & Deckert, 2020).[5] When characteristics such as race are not reported accurately or consistently in news media, it shapes how the public perceives race thereby fuelling existing stereotypes (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:78). Numerous researchers have used a content analysis of this phenomenon to unpack the narratives used by news media to construct racial differences in female offenders. Results from America show that minority-group offenders receive a great deal of scrutiny compared to white offenders (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Colburn & Melander, 2018; Slakoff, 202; & Deckert, 2020).

White female offenders are afforded a more favourable tone with mental health problems used as a central focus, and to diminish and underplay harm to the victim (Slakoff, 2020:2,6; Deckert, 2020:348,353). There is also an assumption that these women are more likely to be rehabilitated (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009:156-159,162; Colburn & Melander, 2018:393; Slakoff, 2020:7). In contrast, offending women of colour are constructed in less favourable terms and are also considered to be less rehabilitatable (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009:162; Slakoff, 2020:3). In American newspapers, crime news stories about female offenders of colour are more frequently accompanied by photographs and mugshots than stories of white female perpetrators (Colburn & Melander, 2018:393). Māori women in conflict with the law are also demonised in New Zealand by over-representing crimes such as homicide, child abduction, and theft, (Deckert, 2020:353). Black women are depicted as angry, masculine, lazy, hostile, and over-sexualised, among other negative labels (Slakoff, 2020:3). Female Latino offenders are mostly represented in stories about crimes relating to immigration, and abuse of welfare services (Slakoff, 2020:4). Middle Eastern woman offenders are depicted by their involvement in terrorism despite the limited available data regarding their involvement in such crimes in America (Slakoff, 2020:5). Native American women (not necessarily offenders) are characterised as heavy drinkers and brutal savages (Slakoff, 2020:6). Asian female offenders are typified as subordinate to males, and as “dangerous due to their exotic sexuality” (Slakoff, 2020:6).

[5] Minority groups in these studies included black, Latino, European Muslim, Native American, Middle Eastern, and Asian female offenders in the two American studies, and Māori female offenders in New Zealand.

The studies above show that conversations about the construction of the 'ideal' woman are far more complex than just the male-female disparity. Not only are news consumers offered the polarised narratives of 'good' and 'bad' women, but they are also faced with the 'good' white woman and the 'bad' 'other' woman.

2.4. Eight Narratives for Constructing Female Offenders

When women are implicated in crimes, society and the media are at a loss for rational explanations for these behaviours (Jewkes, 2015:134). Because they cannot fathom female offenders, the media creates alternative discourses to illustrate these women. Jewkes outlines eight narratives that the media employs to construct female offenders namely: 'sexuality and sexual deviance', 'physical attractiveness' or the absence thereof, 'bad wives', 'bad mothers', 'mythical monsters', 'evil manipulators', 'mad cows', and 'non-agents'.

The first two narratives, 'sexuality and sexual deviance' and 'physical attractiveness' (Jewkes, 2015:135-140) demonstrate how the media places a significant amount of emphasis on female sexuality and physical looks. Sexuality and sexual deviance refer to the media's vilification of females who exhibit some form of licentious behaviours, homosexuality, or carry out more serious crimes like sexual assault. These women are seen to transgress the socially prescribed norms and behaviours that expect women to be heterosexual and monogamous. Males who display such behaviours do not attract as much negative attention in the press because sexual misconduct is almost normalised and expected by society (Jewkes, 2015:140). Physical attractiveness is linked to female sexuality in that conventionally attractive female offenders are characterised in the media as entrapping their victims with their seductive looks. They are described as shallow and morally corrupt *femme fatales* (Jewkes, 2015:140).

Narratives three and four, 'bad wives' and 'bad mothers' (Jewkes, 2015:141-146) describe how the media set female offenders up against the backdrop of traditional conservative gender stereotypes where society assigns women identities as mothers and wives. The media is particularly focused on female offenders' marital and parental

statuses, and their family background, something that is not emphasised for male offenders (Jewkes, 2015:141). If women of a certain age are unmarried or do not have children, they are considered unnatural for disregarding the natural order of their prescribed roles in society such as being housewives who look after the children and are dependent on their husbands (Jewkes, 2015:142-143). On the other hand, if they are married or have children, they are equally contravening the natural order when they offend against them. When women are violent towards men, commit spousal homicide, infanticide, filicide, or child sexual abuse, there is public outcry and the media capitalises on labelling these women as ‘bad’ wives and ‘bad’ mothers due to the seeming rarity of such crimes (2015:143). Transgressions against these socially defined female roles are the epitome of ‘badness’.

The fifth and sixth narratives employed by the media are ‘mythical monsters’ and ‘evil manipulators’ (Jewkes, 2015:146-148; 150-152) that speak to the manner in which female offenders are demonised and held fully accountable for their actions. It is not uncommon for the media to liken women who kill or display sexual aggression in their crimes to lustful blood-sucking vampires, witches, and mythical creatures such as Medusa and Madea of Greek mythology (Jewkes, 2015:146). Furthermore, female offenders who cannot be constructed as mentally unstable, victims of abuse, or coerced by another, are tagged as evil manipulators who steer men into depravity in acting out their fantasies (Jewkes, 2015:150-151). According to the media, such men may never delve into criminal acts without the support of their female co-offenders. It is interesting to note here that greater blame is placed on the woman because she has not upheld her role as protector, nurturer, and carer.

The last two narratives employed by the media are ‘mad cows’ and ‘non-agents’ (Jewkes, 2015:148-150; 152-154). These depictions of female offenders suggest that women are not always fully responsible for their actions because they are either troubled with psychiatric or physical problems, have been coerced into criminality by another party, or are victims of abuse themselves (Jewkes, 2015:149-150,153-154). Mothers who kill their children must be either ‘mad’ or ‘sad’ to transgress their natural nurturing state. Jewkes explains that by depicting female offenders as monsters, they are also stripped of their humanity which allows the media to deny their agency as women (Jewkes, 2015:153).

Many of these narratives overlap one another and female offenders may be portrayed in several combinations of these narratives. Not all media houses hold the same values or prescribe the same narratives in their storytelling so it is quite possible that while one media house may focus heavily on physical attractiveness, manipulation, and demonise a female offender, another may be more lenient and portray her as a psychologically damaged victim of her circumstances.

2.5. What You See is What They Want You to See

People's fascination with crime is evident in the amount of coverage it receives in the news and media. No news broadcast or publication is without some mention of crime. However, not every crime is featured in the news. The stories that are selected must, in some way, represent the existing socio-political ideology and what is considered newsworthy at the time. Additionally, news houses are driven by sales and profits and to meet their targets, stories must be told in a way that captivates news consumers and keeps them interested. As a result, many crime stories become sensationalised and the true nature of crime, offenders, and victims is misrepresented. Ultimately, news consumers are offered a skewed perspective on the issue of crime and racial, religious, and gender stereotyping is subtly reinforced.

The literature presented in this chapter has placed the spotlight on the media's gendered stereotyping and shows that across various crime types women are pitted against the social construction of femininity. Several narratives are employed to construct these women as the quintessential 'meek and mild' woman who is not fully responsible for her crimes because she is struggling with previous or current abuse, mental or physical health issues, or she has been pushed over the edge. In some cases, the female offender and her crime are romanticised, especially in the case of sexual offences with a minor. Sometimes, the media seemingly ignores these factors and emphasises the total deviation from the 'ideal' woman. They depict female perpetrators as entirely bad, fully responsible for their actions, and at times they demonise these offenders. Other demographic factors such as race, religion, age, and marital status also have an impact on how female offenders are constructed in the media. More specifically, white women,

young women, unmarried women, and socio-economically disadvantaged women are portrayed in a more sympathetic tone than women of colour who are married and of higher economic standing.

Regardless of the specific narrative used, female offenders are constantly judged against the social construction of femininity. The media paint an ‘all good’ or ‘all bad’ picture of women perpetrators providing their consumers with only two perspectives from which to make one of two judgements. There is no consistency in news reporting on female-perpetrated crimes and criminality. This black-and-white way of reporting does not represent fairness and impartiality in crime news construction and perpetuates gender stereotypes.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to fill the gap in knowledge about how female offenders are constructed in the print media, specifically newspapers. Review of the literature showed that there has been no academic research in South Africa on this topic, or on the portrayal of women accused of different crime types. There has been no test of Jewkes' (2015) portrayal of female offenders in crime news reporting in international or South African academic research. This dissertation undertook this task by exploring whether Jewkes' eight narratives were reflected in South African newspaper constructions of female offenders; what other narratives were used to portray female offenders; and whether there was a difference in how these narratives were applied to female offenders (either based on the type of crime or their race/ethnicity).

3.1. Research Design

This dissertation used a qualitative exploratory approach to uncover how female criminal offending is portrayed in the media. A qualitative method allowed rich and meaningful data analysis that lets emerging themes present themselves (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:53; Fouché & Delport, 2017:64-65). Research focussing on media constructions of female offenders has mostly followed either a quantitative or qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis (Saavedra & Oliveira, 2017) or discourse analysis (Noh et al, 2010).

Using Saavedra and Oliveira's (2017) model, this dissertation used a qualitative thematic analysis technique because it permitted both inductive and deductive analysis, it was flexible (Braun & Clarke: 2006:83), and it was an iterative exercise that systematically reduced the data into overarching themes (Guest et al., 2012:12). Unlike discourse analysis, it was not interested in semantic and pragmatic language usage. Distinct from content analysis, thematic analysis does not dictate specific data collection methods and does not prescribe to any particular conceptual frameworks. Thematic analysis, therefore, suited the combination of deductive and inductive goals of this project as it sought to

prove the existence of a predetermined set of themes and to find previously unidentified themes.[6]

3.2. Research Method

Sampling Strategy

This dissertation used South African newspaper stories of women in conflict with the law as its units of analysis. I followed a purposive sampling method as it allowed me to select a sample that represented specific elements of the population that assisted in answering my research question (Babbie & Mouton, 2012:165; Strydom & Delport, 2017b:392). Purposive sampling allowed me to examine South African English newspapers with crime news articles reporting on female offenders of specific crime types. The purposive sampling criteria was the selection of crime news stories reporting on female offenders in English South African newspapers.

I opted to work with a sample of newspapers that spanned a ten-year period (01 January 2011 to 31 December 2020) to have sufficient variation and a sizable sample size. I included one newspaper from each of the nine provinces to ensure cross-national coverage of newspapers with the highest circulation rates. Only five provinces (Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Kwazulu-Natal, Northern Cape) had provincial coverage in addition to smaller local newspapers. Table 1 below summarises the five top newspapers per province which were ultimately selected for my study.

[6] It is deductive because a codebook is initially created to reflect the eight narratives of Jewkes (2015), and deductive because the research question also asks whether additional themes or narratives are present in SA newspapers.

Table 1. Top Five Newspaper Circulation Rates Per Province [7]

Province	Newspaper	Distribution
Gauteng	The Star	57 109
Kwazulu Natal	Daily News	18 863
Eastern Cape	Daily Dispatch	13 340
Western Cape	Cape Times	25 592
Northern Cape	Diamond Fields Advertiser	6 785

Research by Artz, Hoffman-Wanderer, and Moult (2012), and Steyn and Booyens' (2017) showed that female offenders most commonly engaged in violent crimes, drug-related crimes, and economic crimes. Based on this, I included these three crime types in my sample. Because much of the research on media portrayals of female perpetrators has focussed on women's offences against children (Grabe et al, 2006; Cavaglion, 2008; Evans, 2012; Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012; Hayes & Baker, 2012; Collins, 2016; Saavedra & Oliveira, 2017; Niblock, 2018), this was included as a fourth crime type.

3.3. Data Collection

Anticipating the volume of news stories about women in conflict with the law across ten years, I embarked on a two-phase data collection strategy. The first stage involved Google searches for online articles reporting on female offenders to identify the names of offenders. In the second stage, these names were searched in the PressReader[8] database across the five newspapers selected for this study, which ultimately lead to the stories being included for data analysis. The two data collection phases are outlined next.

[7] Information collated from https://www.marklives.com/2020/05/circdata-newspapers-abc-q1- 2020/.

[8] Pressreader is an online platform that hosts more than 7000 newspapers and magazines worldwide. Currently it offers 185 English South African newspapers and magazine publications

Initial Google Search

The initial Google search led me to stories of women who were victims of crime and not perpetrators. The Advanced Search function in Google was used to filter my search using pre-determined search terms, language, region, and date range. A total of 80 searches were conducted using different terms as illustrated in Tables 2 to 5. Table 6 shows that a total of 294 names were identified for further searching across the five selected newspapers in the PressReader database.

Table 2. Violent Crimes Google Search Results.

All these words	**Any of these words**	**Number of Google pages**	**Mention female offender**	**Mention names**
Woman accused	assault OR attempted OR murder OR kill	6	14	4
Woman suspected		7	11	3
Woman arrested		7	18	8
Woman convicted		7	11	8
Woman sentenced		7	17	14
Total		34	71	37

Table 3. Financial Crimes Google Search Results.

All these words	**Any of these words**	**Number of Google pages**	**Mention female offender**	**Mention names**
Woman accused	fraud OR corruption OR embezzle OR launder	7	20	19
Woman suspected		10	16	11
Woman arrested		8	32	15
Woman convicted		8	13	10
Woman sentenced		9	24	20
Total		42	105	75

Table 4. Drug-related Crimes Google Search Results.

All these words	Any of these words	Number of Google pages	Mention female offender	Mention names
Woman accused	drug trafficking OR possession OR mule OR dealing	7	17	13
Woman suspected		9	20	6
Woman arrested		9	45	24
Woman convicted		8	23	20
Woman sentenced		9	36	31
Total		42	141	94

Table 5. Crimes Against Children Google Search Results.

Any of these words	All these words	Number of Google pages	Number of Google pages	Mention female offender	Mention names
child OR infant OR teenager OR toddler OR baby	Woman accused	murder	6	15	9
		kill	7	12	9
		torture	8	16	2
		abuse	7	15	0
	Woman suspected	murder	6	4	2
		kill	8	6	4
		torture	8	2	4
		abuse	9	3	0
	Woman arrested	murder	7	18	4
		kill	8	16	5
		torture	8	9	3
		abuse	8	18	0
	Woman convicted	murder	7	6	4
		kill	7	7	6
		torture	8	7	5
		abuse	8	7	5
	Woman sentenced	murder	6	15	13
		kill	7	12	8
		torture	7	11	4
		abuse	8	9	1
Total			18	208	88

Table 6. Summary of Initial Google Search results.

Crime Type	Google Pages	Mention Female	Mention Names
Violent	34	71	37
Financial	42	105	75
Drug-related	42	141	94
Crimes Against Children	148	208	88
Total	266	525	294

PressReader Search

PressReader was accessed via the University of Cape Town library website. Each of the 294 female offenders' names was searched individually in each selected newspaper. Again, I used the Advanced Search option including the offender's name, the language, and the publication.

Articles that fell outside of my prescribed date range (01 January 2011 to 31 December 2020) were excluded. Some offender names yielded no results in the selected newspapers. Where names generated articles, they were briefly checked to see if they were stories about the crimes committed by each offender. Stories that were not about the offender or the crime were excluded.[9] Duplicate articles[10], opinion pieces, and letters to the newspapers were also left out. When articles provided insufficient information they were also excluded.[11] This process of exclusion drastically decreased the number of articles included in the final data collection. Diagrams 1 to 4 illustrate the inclusion and exclusion process.

[9] Many of the identified names gave articles about women who had the same name as the offender or there was no mention about the crime in question. For example, some of the names revealed articles about women who had participated in a sporting activity.

[10] Duplicate articles were identified as having no change in wording or number of words.

[11] Articles with less than 8 sentences were superficial and limited in detail. Other longer articles were excluded when there was little information about the crime and the offender's involvement in the crime. For example, in the case of a celebrity who had been implicated in the murder of her boyfriend, many articles referred to her celebrity activities and not to the crime.

Diagram 1. Violent Crimes Inclusion and Exclusion Process

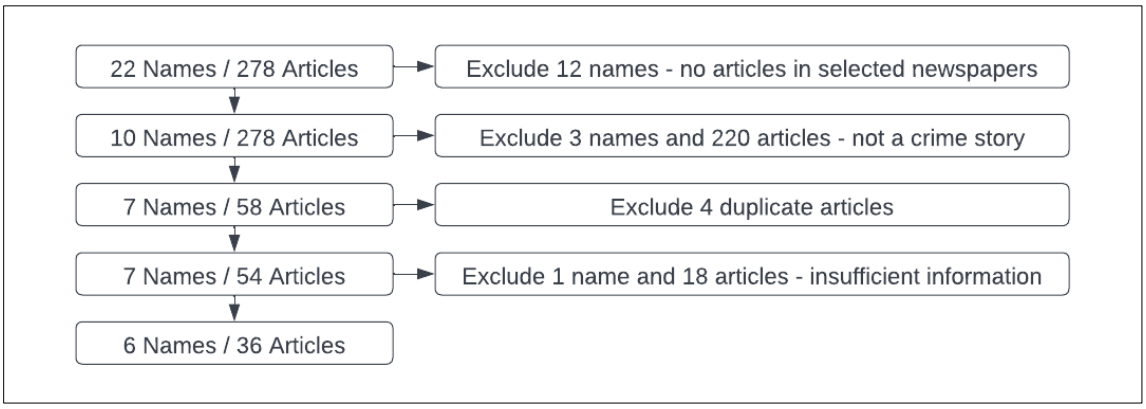


Diagram 2. Crimes Against Children Inclusion and Exclusion Process

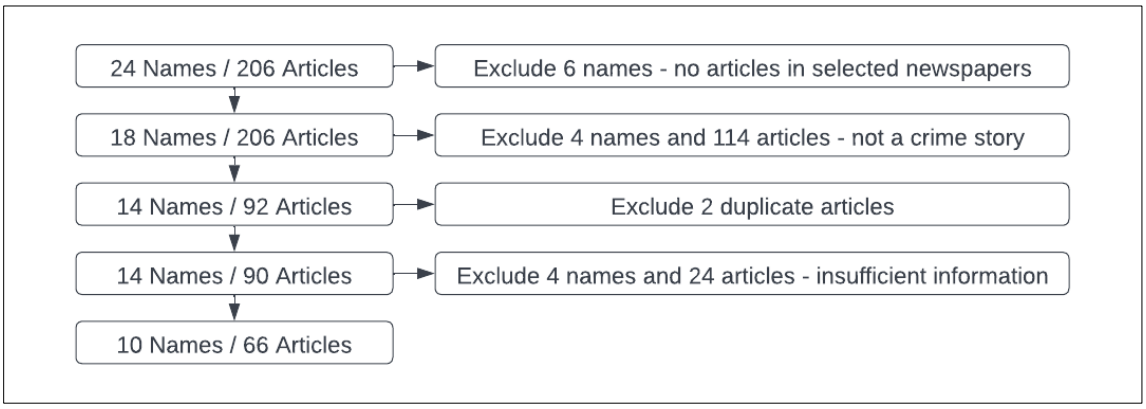


Diagram 3. Financial Crimes Inclusion and Exclusion Process

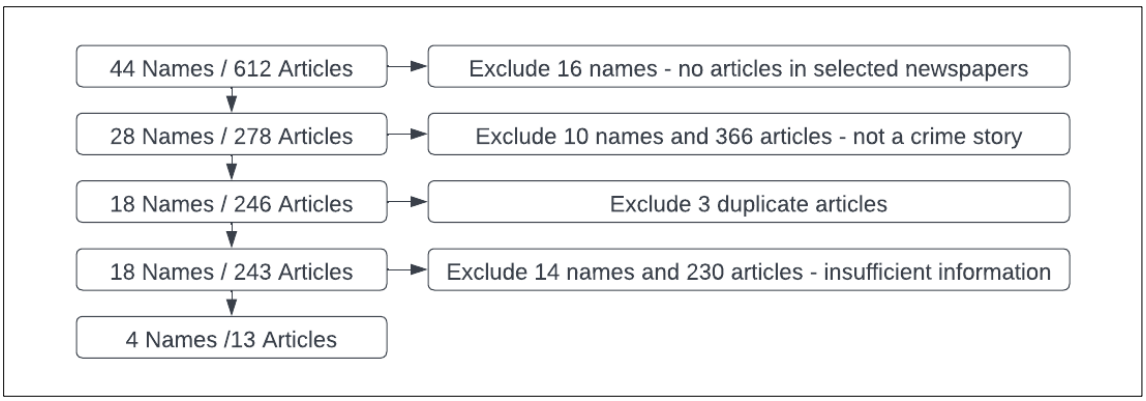
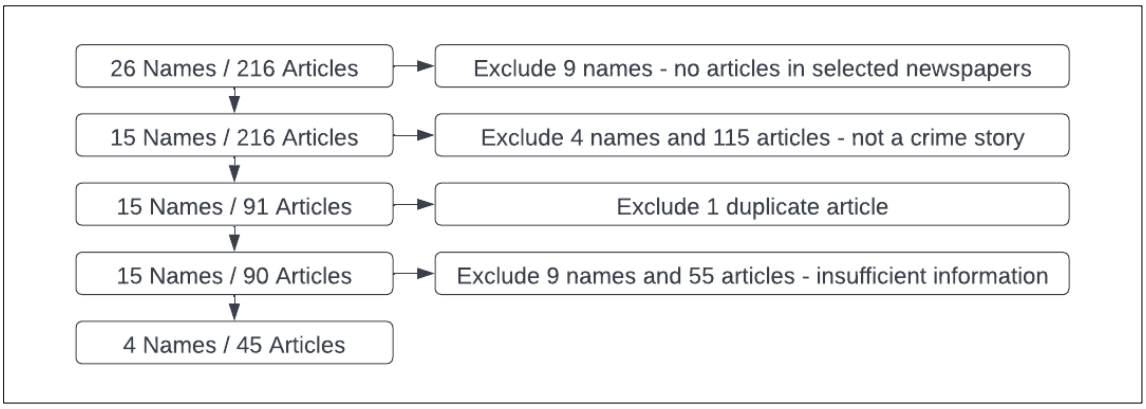


Diagram 4. Drug-related Crimes Inclusion and Exclusion Process



By applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, I was left with a total of 24 female offenders across the four crime categories. Ultimately, 160 articles were included for analysis.

Table 7. Final Data Set

Crime Category	Number of Offenders	Number of Articles
Violent Crimes	6	36
Crimes Against Children	10	66
Financial Crimes	4	13
Drug-related Crimes	4	45
Total	24	160

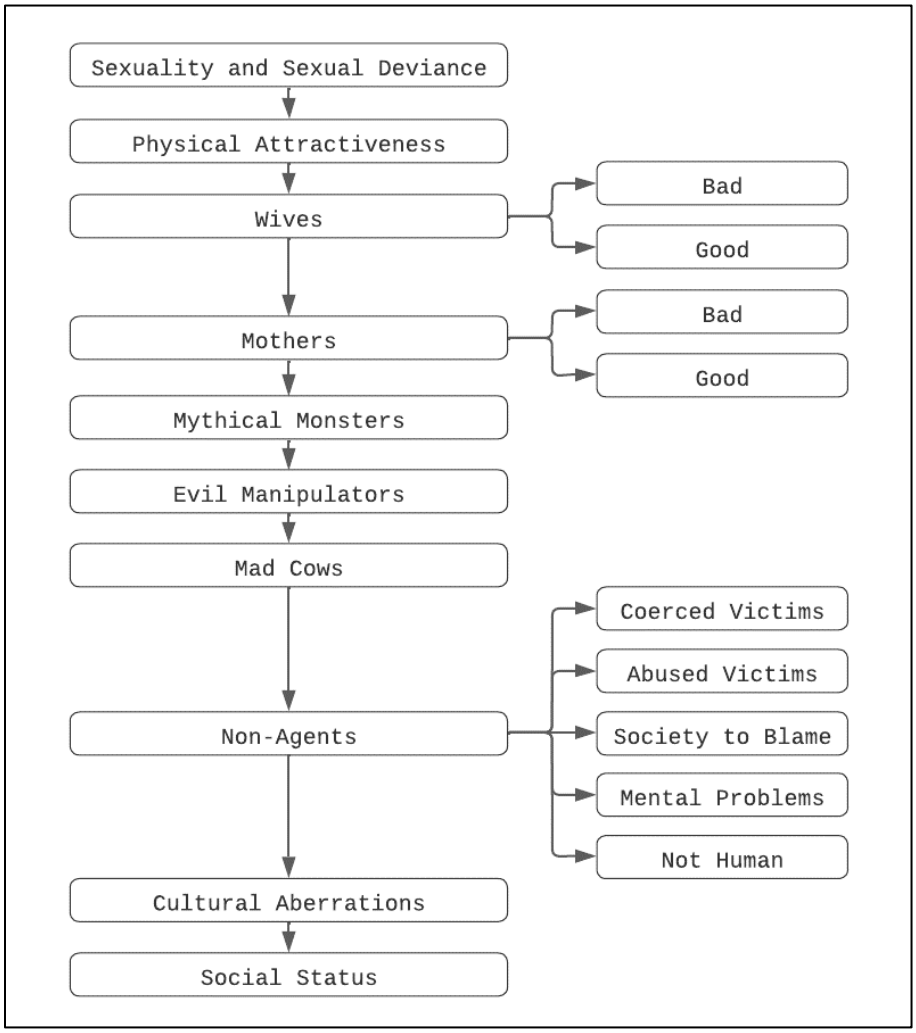
Each article was ‘printed’ to PDF from PressReader and then converted to WORD format so that it could be imported into the data analysis software, NVivo. All articles were stored in electronic file folders in OneDrive according to the offence category and the offender's name. These files were password protected and accessible only to myself and my supervisor to conform to ethics requirements.

3.4. Data Analysis

To analyse the newspaper stories collected, my approach used thematic analysis. This method was deemed most appropriate because it allows for “a more detailed and nuanced account” of certain aspects of the themes that relate to a particular research question and is suitable for novice researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006:83).

An initial coding frame was developed to reflect the eight narratives proffered by Jewkes (2015): (1) ‘physical attractiveness’, (2) ‘sexuality and sexual deviance’, (3) ‘wives’, (4) ‘mothers’, (5) ‘evil manipulators’, (6) ‘mad cows’, (7) ‘mythical monsters’, (8) ‘non-agents’. Three of these codes were split into subcodes revealing nine additional codes. Wives – ‘good’ and ‘bad’, mothers – ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and ‘non-agents’ – ‘coerced victims’, ‘abused victims’, ‘society to blame’, ‘mental problems’, and ‘not human’. After these codes were applied, I inductively coded the data set once again to see if any additional codes could be added that would be relevant to answering my research question. An additional two codes surfaced namely ‘cultural aberrations’ and ‘social status’. Thereafter, I undertook quality checks which identified a few coded items to be removed. Some of the codes were related to each other and these collapsed under ten overarching themes. To keep things simple, the theme names were not changed from the code names. Diagram 5 illustrates this thematic framework. Upon completing the coding and theme identification, I wrote up the findings per theme to demonstrate their relevance to the research questions. To illustrate my findings, I drew excerpts from the codes to substantiate my arguments. These results and discussions are provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

Diagram 5. Themes



3.5. Limitations

This study has several limitations. As the nature of qualitative research is subjective in many ways, it was important for me to be cognisant of my own biases and personal belief systems when interpreting and relaying the stories of these female offenders. As a white female from a middle-class background, I had to challenge my preconceived ideas to ensure that these women and their stories were not subjected to further misrepresentation.

A limitation was imposed by the search strategy through both the Google and PressReader search engines. The Google search posed a significant challenge when my initial search yielded mainly stories of females as victims rather than women accused of crimes. Finding a strategy that produced the desired results was time-consuming. Although the final search and sampling strategy also had its drawbacks, I was able to compile a reasonable sample size of females implicated in criminal offences. Some high-profile cases did not appear when using my Google advanced filters, and many women whose stories did present themselves in Google were eventually excluded as there were no articles in the selected newspapers in the PressReader search. A more comprehensive Google search might have yielded more stories. The inclusion of more newspapers would have allowed for more articles covering the identified women, and a search through additional newspaper databases could have provided articles that may not yet have been loaded on PressReader. Although a more comprehensive Google search and inclusive newspaper selection would have provided a larger sample it may also have compromised the quality of the analysis due to resource constraints such as time limits and the number of researchers. With a larger data set, I may have overlooked codes and themes in my efforts to stay within the given time frame for this project. Future investigations into this topic would benefit from having two researchers who could analyse a more comprehensive data set without compromising the quality of the process and findings.

Thematic analysis has been criticised for failing to capture context (Braun & Clarke 2006:19). This is because only fragments of the body of the text are coded while the rest of the text is cast aside. For example, while one article noted that the phrase ‘mental evaluation’ may fit under the ‘mad cows’ code, it is difficult to analyse without the context provided by the whole article. This is why Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend that the researcher familiarises themselves with the data before applying codes. A second researcher would have been able to cross-evaluate the codes to confirm and provide a consensus that the fragments reflected the code applied. As this was not possible, I mitigated this shortcoming by rereading each article three times to see whether any text fragments had been excluded and needed to be coded.

While doing this I also checked that each coded item was accurately coded. In this way, I ensured that context was not lost during the analysis and interpretation of the codes and themes. While this strategy still has some limitations, it was the most viable option for one researcher within the specified time constraints.

Similar to the coding limitations, being a sole researcher meant that the analysis was limited to my subjective interpretation alone. Having a co-researcher would have allowed for cross-analysis and reaching a consensus regarding the meaning of the themes. While this is a significant limitation, the current study acknowledges its exploratory nature as a starting point for future work on the topic.

Finally, my study was restricted to the South African context, and even more so to English language media. It was also limited by the small sample size relative to the total number of English newspapers in South Africa and the number of articles that may have reported on offences committed by women. Furthermore, the study focused on four crime categories and only included some crime types within each category. Because of these limitations, the results of this study are not generalisable. However, despite these limitations, the study does contribute to the international knowledge on the topic by providing a South African perspective which has previously not been recorded in academic discourse. To further enrich this knowledge base, research that includes a greater range of newspapers, a wider language base, and more crime types, will certainly be beneficial in future studies regarding South African newspaper constructions of female offenders.

3.6. Ethics

Ethical problems were fairly limited in my research project as the data obtained is freely available in the public domain. My study did not involve human participants and matters of privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent were not of concern. No names were published in this report to minimise the possible misrepresentation (harm) of individual women and others involved in their crime stories. This research focussed on

the ways that the newspapers construct female offenders as a group and did not seek to represent the individual women or their stories.

This study was approved by the University of Cape Town Research Ethics Committee. A copy of the clearance certificate is attached in Appendix One.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

International studies have highlighted the different ways in which crime news media portray women in conflict with the law. News reporters have focused on aspects of female offenders' appearance, sexuality, mental health, social and economic statuses, race and ethnicity, histories of abuse, and their roles as wives and mothers to construct them as 'mad', 'bad', or 'sad' (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Grabe, Trager, Lear; & Rauch, 2006; Cavaglion, 2008; Brennan & Vanderberg, 2009; Noh et al., 2010; Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010; Evans, 2012; Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012; Carlyle, et al., 2014; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Jewkes, 2015); Collins, 2016; Saavedra & Oliveira, 2017; Christensen, 2018; Colburn & Melander, 2018; Niblock, 2018; Pelvin, 2019; Deckert, 2020; Slakoff, 2020). By describing women in these ways, the media offers news consumers a narrow and limited perspective on the issue of female offending thereby providing a skewed version of reality (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:61-62; Newburn, 2017:82). Additionally, by misrepresenting the reality of women's involvement in crime, gender stereotyping is perpetuated in the news. (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007:78).

My study analysed how English South African newspapers use specific narratives to construct women in conflict with the law, as well as how these narratives are applied to different categories of crimes. Specifically, I used Jewkes' (2015) eight narratives as a baseline of my investigation to determine whether these narratives are present in South African newspaper stories about female-perpetrated crimes. Through thematic analysis, additional narratives were found in the South African newspaper stories, and it was found that various crime types are portrayed differently.

In this chapter, I set out the findings of my analysis in two parts. The first part shows the ten narratives used in South African newspapers. The second part outlines how the different narratives are used to portray women based on their offence types.

4.1. Ten Narratives

The thematic analysis of 160 English South African newspaper articles covering the stories of 24 women accused of crimes revealed that at least ten different narratives were used to describe these women in crime news. Table 8 below summarises the findings by showing each of the ten narratives, their sub-narratives, the number of women who were described using each narrative, and also the number of times each narrative was mentioned in the articles.

Table 8. Narrative and Sub-narrative Frequency

Narrative	Sub-Narrative	Women (n=24)	Number of Mentions
Sexuality and sexual deviance		2	2
Physical attractiveness		7	24
Wives		6	14
	Good	3	7
	Bad	3	3
Mothers		6	39
	Good	3	28
	Bad	3	11
Mythical monsters		3	3
Mad cows		11	202
Evil manipulators		16	85
Non-agents		8	112
	Coerced victims	2	25
	Abused victims	3	5
	Society to blame	3	25
	Mental problems	6	56
	Not human	1	1
Cultural aberrations		2	5
Social status		14	62

The first eight narratives included in Table 8 correspond with those outlined by Jewkes (2015): ‘sexuality and sexual deviance’, ‘physical attractiveness’, ‘bad wives’, ‘bad mothers’, ‘mythical monsters’, ‘evil manipulators’, ‘mad cows’, and ‘non-agents’. The

remaining two narratives are findings that resulted from my thematic analysis and represent narratives used by South African newspapers when constructing stories about women in conflict with the law.

It is seen that more women were described using the narratives ‘evil manipulators’, ‘social status’ and ‘mad cows’, and that they were less likely to be depicted as ‘cultural aberrations’ or by their ‘sexuality and sexual deviance’. The same trend is observed in the number of times each narrative was mentioned where ‘mad cows’, ‘evil manipulators’ and ‘social status’ were referred to more frequently in the newspaper stories. This similarity is not surprising as one would expect that there will be more narrative mentions when more women are depicted using the narratives. One diversion from this trend is seen in the ‘non-agents’ narrative which was used less frequently than the fore mentioned narratives but received a higher number of mentions compared to the ‘evil manipulators’ and ‘social status’ narratives. However, the fact that the ‘non-agents’ narrative comprises five sub-narratives may account for the higher total mentions.

By dividing the ‘wives’, ‘mothers’ and ‘non-agents’ into sub-narratives, my analysis is able to provide a more holistic picture of how they are applied in South African newspaper stories of women in conflict with the law. Table 8 indicates that the ‘mothers’ and ‘wives’ narratives were each used to describe six women and that they represent both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ versions of these narratives. However, the ‘good mothers’ narrative was used more frequently across the newspaper stories while ‘bad wives’ was the least prevalent. Of the women constructed as ‘non-agents’, ‘mental problems’ was the most prominent way of describing women’s offending behaviours to demonstrate their lack of free will. Female offenders were least likely to be portrayed as ‘not human’ when referring to their lack of agency.

4.2. Narratives and Crime Categories

Of the 24 women whose crime stories were analysed in my study, six were accused of violent crimes[12], ten of crimes against children, four of financial crimes, and four of drug-related crimes. Each crime type was analysed to determine which narratives were used by South African newspapers to describe the women in these offending categories. Table 9 below summarises the findings by showing each of the ten narratives and the number of women who were portrayed using these across the four crime categories.

Table 9. Narrative and Sub-narrative Frequency per Crime Category

Narrative	**Sub-narrative**	**Number of Women (n=24)**			
		Violent (n=6)	**Children (n=10)**	**Financial (n=4)**	**Drugs (n=4)**
Sexuality and sexual deviance		2	0	0	0
Physical attractiveness		2	3	0	2
Wives		5	1	0	0
	Good	2	1	0	0
	Bad	3	0	0	0
Mothers		0	6	0	0
	Good	0	3	0	0
	Bad	0	3	0	0
Mythical monsters		2	1	0	0
Mad cows		1	9	0	1
Evil manipulators		5	6	4	1
Non-agents		1	4	0	3
	Coerced victims	0	0	0	2
	Abused victims	0	3	0	0
	Society to blame	1	2	0	0
	Mental problems	1	4	0	1
	Not human	0	1	0	0
Cultural aberrations		1	0	1	0
Social status		2	6	2	4

[12] Violent Crimes are defined in my study as any crime that results in direct physical harm to the victim. It excludes crimes against children which forms a separate crime category. This means that victims in this category are over the age of 18 years.

Violent Crimes

The violent crimes category was represented by 25 per cent (n=6) of the offender sample.[13] Table 9 shows that South African newspapers used nine narratives to construct female perpetrators of violent crimes. The 'evil manipulators' and 'wives' narratives were each used to describe five women making these the most prominent narratives in this crime category. It is not surprising that the 'wives' narrative features so strongly here as each of the five women referred to as 'wives' were implicated in their partner's murders. However, three of these women were portrayed as 'bad wives' and two as 'good wives'. When the 'non-agents' narrative was used for only one woman, 'mental problems' and 'society to blame' were both used to describe her and her offence. Because none of the women in this category were implicated in child offences, the 'mothers' narrative was not present.

Crimes against children

Of the 24 women included in my research, 41.7 per cent (n=10) had been accused of crimes against children including neglect, physical abuse, and murder. Table 9 indicates that women in this crime category were described using eight different narratives. The most prevalent narrative is 'mad cows' as it was used to describe nine of the ten women. Furthermore, 60 per cent (n=6) were portrayed as 'evil manipulators', 'mothers', and their 'social status' was a key focus. When the 'mother' narrative was used, half the women were portrayed as 'good mothers' and the other half as 'bad mothers'. All of the women who were constructed as 'non-agents' were described as having 'mental problems' but none were referred to as 'coerced victims'. South African newspapers did not use the 'sexuality and sexual deviance' or 'cultural aberration' narratives to construct females who were accused of crimes against children.

[13] Five of these six women were accused of offending against their significant others, while only one woman offended against another woman.

Financial Crimes

Women accused of financial crimes represented 16.7 per cent (n=4) of my sample. As noted in Table 9, only three of the ten narratives were used to portray these women in South African newspapers. Each of the women were portrayed as 'evil manipulators'. Half of them were also constructed around the narrative of 'social status' while the 'cultural aberrations' narrative was only used to describe one of the women.

Drug-related crimes

Four women (16.7%) represented the category of drug-related crimes.[14] Table 9 shows that South African newspapers used five different narratives to portray these women. The most prominent of these narratives was 'social status' which was used to construct each of the four women. Half of the women were constructed using the 'physical attractiveness' and 'non-agents' narratives. As 'non-agents', two-thirds of the women were portrayed as 'coerced victims' and only one as having 'mental problems'. Less attention was given to describing women in conflict with the law as 'mad cows' or 'evil manipulators'.

Table 9 highlights that South African newspapers construct women accused of violent, financial and drug-related crimes, and crimes against children using the 'evil manipulators' and 'social status' narratives. Overall, fewer narratives were used to describe women implicated in financial and drug-related crimes than women involved in violent crimes or drug-related crimes. Only violent female offenders were referred to in terms of the 'sexuality and sexual deviance' and 'bad wives' narratives. The 'good mothers', 'bad mothers', 'abused victims' and 'not human' narratives were only applied to women who were accused of crimes against children. Lastly, the narrative 'coerced victims' was only used to describe women who were involved in drug-related offences.

[14] All four women were accused of being drug mules.

4.3. Summary of Results

The findings presented in this chapter highlight that South African English newspapers portray women in conflict with the law using Jewkes' (2015) eight narratives to different degrees. South African media go beyond these eight narratives and also use 'cultural aberration' and 'social status' narratives when constructing the stories of female-perpetrated crimes. Furthermore, South African crime news media use the ten identified narratives differently depending on the type of crime that is reported. Chapter 5 discusses these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter explores and discusses the findings as explicated in Tables 8 and 9 by extracting excerpts from the raw data to illustrate how the narratives are used in English South African newspapers. The discussion is divided into three elements namely: (1) confirming Jewkes' eight narratives, (2) new-found narratives, and (3) different crime, different narrative. In the first section, I briefly revisit Jewkes' (2015) eight narratives to contextualise the discussion which explains how South African newspapers use these narratives when reporting on female-perpetrated crimes. The second section reveals how the two additional narratives 'cultural aberration' and 'social status' are used in South African crime news stories about women offenders and their crimes. In the last section, I discuss how the ten narratives are applied to different crime types.

5.1. Confirming Jewkes' Eight Narratives

According to Jewkes (2015:135-154), the media uses eight narratives to construct female offenders in crime news stories namely: 'sexuality and sexual deviance', 'physical attractiveness', 'bad wives', 'bad mothers', 'mythical monsters', 'evil manipulators', 'mad cows', and 'non-agents'. Table 8 in Chapter 4 shows that South African newspaper journalists used each of Jewkes' (2015) eight narratives to some degree when reporting on women in conflict with the law. However, as will be seen in this section, there are some deviations in how these narratives were applied in South African journalism.

Sexuality and Sexual Deviance

Jewkes (2015:135-140) and Berrington and Honkatukia (2002:69) explain that the media detail female perpetrators' promiscuity or sexual orientation to demonstrate how they do not represent the socially constructed 'ideal' woman. In this study, only two of the 24 women were described using this particular narrative.

In the case of a woman who was convicted of hiring a hitman to murder her husband, the sub-headline of one article stated: "*High court judge unfolds dark drama of greed, lust and betrayal."* (Jacob, 2020a:1). This insinuates that the offender's actions were motivated by her sexual appetite and that this may have led to her act of betrayal. The article did not provide any specific details regarding her sexual conduct that might substantiate such a conclusion, and resorted to sensationalist journalism, which was not based on fact, or at least, not facts that were presented.

Another newspaper article referred specifically to the sexual deviance of a South African celebrity, who was implicated, but not charged, in the murder of her former lover, a soccer star. The news story cited a comment made by a Twitter user which portrayed the female suspect as an adulterer by writing: "*You see what messing in someone's marriage does; you should be stoned you adulterous witch."* (SAPA, 2014c:1). Although the affair was publicly known, the journalist chose to publish this specific view which provokes an emotive response to this woman's actions. It sensationalised the story and offered an uninformed, narrow, and biased perspective of one Twitter user. News consumers were left with a negative image of this woman based on insufficient contextual information from which to make their own judgments.

These two cases illustrate that crime reporters for some South African newspapers invoke images of the sexual deviance of women implicated in criminal offences when the matter of sexual behaviour is not clearly or specifically linked to the crime. While this may make the report more newsworthy, it results in the facts of the crime being overlooked and the women offender potentially being misrepresented. The public is left with only one perspective from which to make their assumptions and conclusions thereby bringing into question the issue of bias and impartiality in crime news reporting.

Furthermore, by emphasising these women's sexual deviance there is an underlying comment on societal expectations of women. Extra-marital affairs and lustfulness are not characteristics associated with the 'ideal' woman. Not only are these women condemned for their crimes, but they are anomalies of the female gender because of their sexual behaviours.

Physical Attractiveness

Jewkes (2015:140-141) and Berrington and Honkatukia (2002:69) describe how the media frequently focus on female offenders' attractiveness and insinuate that they entice their victims with their beauty, characterising them as superficial and amoral. In this study, seven female offenders were referred to by their physical appearance. Four articles commented only on the women's clothing, or their hairstyles as exemplified in these quotations:

> *… dressed in a black training top and jeans* (Evans, 2014c:1; Evans, 2014d:3; & Evans, 2014e:6).
>
> *… her hair swept back in a ponytail and wearing a striped sleeveless top* (Hollands, B. 2015a:3).

In contrast to the findings of Jewkes (2015), and Berrington and Honkatukia (2002), South African newspapers may report on irrelevant yet neutral and factual information regarding the women's appearances. These news stories offer no insight into the perceived attractiveness of the women, nor do they provide a glimpse into their respective mental states ('mad' or 'sad'); it is neither newsworthy nor sensationalist. Nevertheless, by emphasising their unassuming appearances, there is a suggestion that these women are 'normal' and that female criminals should be physically identifiable through their appearance.

Another story was more descriptive in depicting the offender as "*wearing a striped casual shirt and pants, [she] looked the picture of health"* (Harvey, 2019e:1). This statement creates a more positive perception of the woman who is not 'mad', 'sad', or seductively attractive. Like the neutral portrayals of female offenders, the implication is that a woman of good health, as opposed to dishevelled, sickly, or unstable, is by all standards 'normal'. These fairly neutral or slightly positive constructions of female offenders set them apart from their crimes as they do not look like criminals.

In other instances, news articles did have an emotive element where the women's appearance was used to emphasise behaviours and emotions that depicted female offenders in a more negative light. For example, in an article reporting on a woman's

murder of a pregnant woman to obtain her unborn baby, the media painted a picture of the accused as disinterested in the court proceedings by reporting that "*[She] had her hoodie pulled over her head for most of her appearance in the South Gauteng High Court, sitting in the Palm Ridge Magistrates court."* (Roane, 2014b:2). As a seemingly disinterested party in her own trial, news readers may perceive the offender as remorseless and callous. The perpetrator's crime and subsequent appearance were used to vilify her for not representing society's predetermined idea of the 'ideal' woman.

There were times when the South African print media reported on both the female offender's clothing and behaviours to emphasise their 'badness'. One reporter quoted a family member of a woman accused of orchestrating the murder of her husband when she said, "*When we arrived, she did not look like a person who was in mourning, she wore a mini skirt, sleeveless top and sat on the sofa like a happy child.*" (Jacob, 2020b:1). This offender was portrayed in a very negative light by highlighting what was perceived as her inappropriate way of dressing and behaving in the days following her husband's murder. By reporting on the family's disgust at the woman's nonchalant attitude about her husband's death, the media subtly commented on society's prescribed code of conduct for mourning. It implied guilt and inherent 'badness' when women transgress the behavioural code thereby reinforcing gender role stereotyping.

My study indicates that South African newspaper crime stories remark on female offenders' physical appearance but not necessarily their attractiveness. It also seems that these reports are typically more neutral in reporting facts than Jewkes' (2015: 140-141) predictions and conjure up images of the 'normal' woman. However, in some cases, appearance has been used to construct female perpetrators as 'bad' for not dressing or behaving according to societal expectations.

Wives

Jewkes (2015:141-143) pointed out that crime news reports of female offenders sometimes construct them as 'bad wives'. These are women who transgress societal norms and stereotypes of a loving, and subservient wife (Noh et al., 2010:125; Carlyle et al., 2014:2411; Jewkes, 2015:140; Pelvin, 2019:350). Typically, this is in the case of

women who commit violent acts against their children or intimate partners. In my study, six out of the 24 women in the sample were referred to as ‘wives’. Half of these were portrayed as ‘bad wives’ and the other half as ‘good wives’.

Bad Wives

In South African newspaper stories of female offenders, three different women were referred to as ‘bad wives’. They were portrayed in a negative light in terms of their betrayal of the role of a wife. In the case of the woman who was convicted of staging her husband’s murder, the news reporter quoted the judge who stated that the offender “*wanted her husband dead because she did not love him anymore because of his big buttocks and unequal eyes…”* (Jacob, 2020a:1). Here we see how it is implied that a woman should love her husband unconditionally, regardless of his physical appearance. She was portrayed as shallow and fickle rather than caring and dedicated to her partner as society would expect.

The ‘bad wives’ narrative is also used by the South African print media when they emphasise the words of the family of the victim to elicit sympathy in the news reader. For example, a father of a murder victim was cited as saying that “*She has recently said that being in love with [him] had been a waste of her time.”* (Majola, 2016:3). The father’s statement was used to cast a negative light on the accused woman who was described as flighty and deceitful. An undertone of emotional pain and disappointment present in the father’s words evokes sympathy for the man and distaste for the accused woman. What is perhaps most important to note here is that the woman, in this case, has never been formally arrested for her suspected role in the murder. Yet, because of the celebrity status of both the woman and the victim, the story was sensationalised. The woman was vilified on a public platform without any evidence of her involvement in the crime.

Sometimes the media is subtle in how they employ the ‘bad wife’ narrative, but there are times when they are more explicit and unforgiving. This was seen in the case where the reporter quoted the judge saying: “*You betrayed your husband, who called out for you while he was being stabbed 16 times.”* (Venter, 2016:5). In this instance, the reporter portrayed the convicted woman as disloyal, ruthless, and unworthy of sympathy.

Each of these stories offered speculation or sensationalised statements that would leave the newsreaders with feelings of distaste for these women. The ‘bad wife’ narrative is constructed around women not loving their partners enough. In this way, South African newspapers are sometimes shown to pit female offenders against the socially constructed norms of the role of a wife, drawing on tropes that love should be unwavering and that wives should behave in a manner that embodies faithfulness and loyalty.

The low number of mentions in the sample suggests that the ‘bad wife’ narrative may not be the most common depiction of gender stereotyping in South African media. It may also not be as sensationalised as other breaches of the female gender stereotype like ‘mad cows’ or ‘evil manipulators’. This is consistent with the findings of Wozniak and McCluskey (2010) and Pelvin (2019).

Good Wives

The ‘good wives’ theme was found in the stories of three out of 24 offending women indicating that newspaper journalists in South Africa were as likely to report on women who fit the stereotypical gender role as those who did not. For example, a woman convicted of shooting her two children was described by her attorney as *“an intelligent, healthy, normal, person [who] loves her husband and children dearly”* (Venter, 2018g:5). This particular reference to the ‘good wife’ is laden with positive descriptors portraying the perpetrator as the quintessential woman; separate from the crime that was committed. Her identity as a wife and mother has been maintained despite her murderous actions.

In the story about the South African celebrity whose lover was murdered, a friend of the couple was quoted commenting on the negative publicity that the woman was receiving in the media. He said “*I know that [she] and [he] were in love. Why would she kill him? They were lovers.”* (Zeeman, 2018:5). Overall, the article had a positive and sympathetic tone from which news consumers could view the offender as possibly being innocent. Her love for her partner was used as a tool to cast suspicion upon the likelihood of her guilt as it seems unthinkable that such love and dedication could result in murder.

Another article detailing the story of a woman convicted of having her husband murdered quoted the cousin of the victim saying: "*They were married in 2014, on the first time I saw her I said she was a good person who appeared to be in love with her husband. We were not aware of any marital problems."* (Jacob, 2020b:1). By quoting this family member, the media reinforced the idea of perfect marriages where 'good' women love their partners. The fact that there were no overt signs of difficulties within the relationship was used to juxtapose the woman's actions against her apparent 'goodness' thereby maintaining her identity as the archetypal wife.

The women who are represented in these stories were characterised as loving and enjoying good relationships with their intimate partners. It seems to imply that these particular offenders had an element of 'normal' life and were exemplary partners. When newspapers employ this type of narrative, it is a form of subliminal messaging that reinforces gender role stereotyping in romantic relationships. It also romanticises and normalises 'typical' relationships which essentially makes the crime an aberration for defying society's construction of the 'ideal' relationship.

Superficially, the 'bad wives' and 'good wives' narratives provided different pictures of female offenders. However, upon closer inspection, they served the same purpose: to perpetuate the social construction of gender roles and to instil shock value when women (wives) commit crimes. In this way, news consumers' interest is piqued and they remain engaged in the story. As a result, newspaper sales increase and profits rise as people want to follow the story.

Mothers

Jewkes (2015), Niblock (2018), and Cavaglion (2008) argued that some crime news reports focussed on female offenders' roles as mothers, and in particular their failure as mothers, to reinforce the conventional standard of femininity. These women were depicted as 'bad mothers' whose acts of violence were inconsistent with society's idea of the 'ideal' mother and of a woman who is inherently loving, caring, and nurturing. My study revealed that South African newspaper journalists drew on this narrative in some cases but not in others as some mothers were portrayed as the embodiment of motherhood in

the current data set. As with the ‘wives’ theme, both ‘good’ – and ‘bad mothers’ narratives were evident in South African newspaper stories of female-perpetrated crimes.

Bad Mothers

In total, three of the 24 female offenders were referred to as ‘bad mothers’. Consistent with Jewkes (2015), Niblock (2018), and Cavaglion’s (2008) findings, an emphasis on neglect and failure to protect the children in their care was found in the South African newspaper crime stories. The first case discussed here covers the sentencing of a woman who received four life terms for poisoning her four children. The judge was quoted saying: “*Their mother was meant to nurture and protect them… She betrayed her own children.”* (DDC, 2019:5). This extract provides an example of how the female gender role, which encompasses motherhood, was used to highlight the mother’s betrayal. It demonstrates how nurturing and protecting are synonymous with the ‘ideal’ woman and mother. In this instance, the mother is not a representative of the ‘good’ and ‘ideal’ mother by way of her crime. There was no comment on mitigating circumstances that may contextualise the crime and provide a holistic picture of the woman. This report portrayed her only as a mother, and a ‘bad’ one at that.

The next news story reported on the sentencing procedures of the parents who fatally tortured their three-year-old son. The news reporter wrote that “*Judge Matshitse said the mother’s negligence had caused her son’s death… As a parent, she deliberately failed to give her son proper care…”* (Koko, 2019a:2). When taking into account that the father was also convicted of this crime, the fact that the mother was accused of failing to protect her child is evidence of the gender-embedded stereotyping in the media and the justice system. Although both parents were found guilty of the crime, the father’s role in the crime was side-lined while the mother’s ‘badness’ and lack of maternal instincts were placed in central focus. Not only was she a ‘bad’ parent and mother, but also a ‘bad’ woman for having defied society’s construction of the female gender role.

Another way in which gender stereotyping using the ‘bad mothers’ narrative was employed in South African media was noted in a report about a mother who was sentenced to 18 years in prison for beating her three-year-old daughter to death. The

article stated that: *[She] was also declared unsuitable to work with children, and her name would be listed in the National Child Protection register.* (Dano, 2017b:2). This reference to the mother's unsuitability to work with children, in general, indicates how society's expectations of mothers extend beyond their own children. Being a 'bad' mother, in this case, was portrayed as transgressing against all children and, by extension, the institution of motherhood.

Negligence, failure to nurture and protect, and unsuitability to work with children are strongly emphasised in these stories covering women's roles in offending against children. It highlights these women's apparent shortcomings as women in failing to protect their children or the children in their care, and in so doing, their defiance of the expected instincts of womanhood and motherhood. Like with the 'bad wives' narrative, these women have been depicted as breaching the socially constructed gender role which dictates that women should love, care for, nurture, and protect children without reservation. In this way, the notion of 'ideal' motherhood is perpetuated by inferring that women must be all 'good', and if they are not, they are all 'bad'. The lack of context coupled with this binary view of motherhood leaves little room for newsreaders to come to any other conclusions about these women and thereby illustrates the biased nature of crime news reporting in South African newspapers.

Good Mothers

Three of the 24 female perpetrators in my sample were portrayed as 'good mothers' which is an equal number to that portrayed by the 'bad mothers' narrative. However, when referring to Table 8, it is noteworthy that in the reviewed news articles, more mentions were made of the 'good mother' compared to the 'bad mother' (28 and 11 mentions respectively). This suggests that South African newspapers in this sample hammered on the 'good' rather than the 'bad' narratives in their attempts to restore the idea of 'ideal' motherhood. They also appeared to demonstrate more sympathy for perpetrating mothers by portraying them in a more positive light.

This narrative is exemplified in the case of a mother accused of smothering her three physically impaired children to death. The journalist reported that "*A South African mother*

loved her three disabled children dearly, and exhausted herself financially and emotionally to ensure their well-being before eventually killing them." (SAPA: 2014d:5). In this instance, the mother's commitment to her children was demonstrated through her actions where she sacrificed her own needs and resources to ensure their well-being. She was portrayed as the quintessential mother despite the fact that she killed her children. It was implied that 'perfect' mothers should place their children above all else, even when it means foregoing their own needs. It is important to mention here that the family in this case were financially stable and had the resources to care for their children. In South Africa, this is rarely the case and many households struggle to make ends meet. By constructing the 'ideal' mother's role as sacrificing of herself for her children, unrealistic expectations are placed on women to reach this ultimate goal of the 'good and 'perfect' mother.

Another mother was referred to by her attorney as "*a good mother who has only the best interests of her family at heart."* (Venter, 2017f:5). Even though she had been found guilty of shooting and killing her two sons, the idea that she had her children's best interests at heart was used to imply that she was a good mother. In quoting the attorney's opinion in this news report, the picture of the 'ideal' mother was conjured to support the position that the offending mother is essentially 'good'. Although she killed her two children, her identity as a mother was maintained as her crime was separated from her role as a 'good mother'. In this way, the media reinforced the idea that mothers are 'good' when their children's needs and interests are cherished. Even when they have committed crimes against their children, their caring nature protects them from the 'bad mothers' narrative.

This next extract from a news story following the trial of a mother accused of killing her 7-year-old son by drugging and suffocating him offered a different take on the 'good mother' narrative. In the article, the reporter commented on what the accused's brother said by writing *"He said that she had loved her son unconditionally, spoiling him with toys every month and regularly taking him out on excursions.* "(Masuku, 2019a:3). In contrast to the previous two quotes that highlighted the caring and nurturing characteristics of motherhood, this particular reference emphasised the materialistic aspects of being a 'good mother' who showed her unwavering love for her child by buying toys and going on outings. While this demonstration of affection is not necessarily wrong, it does pose

unrealistic expectations for mothers, especially in countries like South Africa where poverty rates are high, and many households live below the bread line. The media's use of the 'good mother' narrative in this case created the skewed perception that mothers who do not indulge their children are 'bad mothers'.

Despite the fact that these women killed their children, the journalists covering these stories emphasised their undeniable love using words like "*dearly"*, "*affectionate"*, and "*unconditionally"*. These offenders were portrayed as loving, caring, and 'normal', representing the quintessential nurturing woman with a natural instinct for motherhood. Indeed, the second quotation specifically referred to the mother as "*normal"*. Here, the media tried to preserve the social construction of feminism and what it is to be a 'good' mother by separating the woman's 'goodness' from her criminal behaviour. This highlights society's tendency to define women and their actions in binary terms: either all good or all bad. One of the offenders included in my data sample commented on this inflexible dichotomous way of constructing women by stating that *"I do love our children, just not in the way you want us to."* (SAPA, 2014e:2).

By presenting the women in such terms, news consumers can maintain their perception of an 'all good' mother without engaging the complicated and messy truth that might lie beneath. In this way, the media controls how society continues to construct social and gender roles by oversimplifying information. By watering down the information and misrepresenting the facts, the media plays a significant role in gender stereotyping.

Mythical Monsters

Mythical monsters represent the fifth narrative identified by Jewkes. Jewkes (2015: 146), Hayes & Baker (2014:5), and Christensen (2018:185) mentioned that the media sometimes demonise female offenders by describing them as wicked supernatural beings like vampires, witches, or monsters. In some cases, Jewkes contended that this was the media's attempt to dehumanise the woman in some way, stripping her of her culpability by diverting attention to the actions of some mythical creature. My findings supported this to some degree as observed in the two quotations discussed below.

A journalist quoted a Twitter comment about a woman suspected of being involved in the murder of her intimate partner saying *"… you should be stoned you adulterous witch"* (SAPA, 2014c:1). By calling the woman an *"adulterous witch"* the message was sent that 'normal' women do not commit adultery. Furthermore, the reference to stoning the woman reinforced that she is not human, and that her guilt is presumed based on archaic practices of witch-hunting. As a result, she should not be afforded humane treatment such as a fair trial and fair punishment. Although this snippet did not necessarily reflect the views of the journalist, it does demonstrate how using non-factual information gathered from a social media platform can misrepresent the facts and the offender, and intensify gender stereotyping. Such sensationalist reporting is used to capture readership which essentially results in increased sales and profits.

In this excerpt, there was no mention of a specific creature or monster, however, there was an undeniable sense that the crime occurred as a result of something beyond human nature. The news reporter quoted the prosecutor saying "*This (death) is far beyond the realms of what we thought human beings are capable of*." (Koko, 2019:c). Here it was inferred that the offending woman's behaviour did not resemble human actions but rather those of some mystical, perhaps demonic, being. Women are, therefore, depicted as incapable of committing certain acts. However, when they do, it is far beyond the comprehension of society and its construction of humanity and, by association, femininity. By reporting this specific statement, the media reinforced that women are meant to behave in a particular way and by not doing so, they are unnatural aberrations, not worthy of being deemed women.

Evil Manipulators

Jewkes (2015), Collins (2016:305), and Noh et al. (2010:120,126) speak of the media's inclination to portray some female offenders as manipulative, vengeful, cold-hearted, and essentially ''bad. Specifically, Jewkes (2015) details how these manipulative women influence men to commit crimes. In my study, the evil manipulator narrative was used for 16 out of 24 (66.7%) of the women implicated in criminal activities. The discussion here

shows how this narrative was used in different ways when referring to women in conflict with the law and the crimes of which they were accused.

In the story of a couple found guilty of fraud, the magistrate was quoted as stating: "*The depth of deceit and dishonesty that you have resorted to during the commission of your offence, as well as during this trial, have been both startling and bewildering."* (Peters, 2011:5). Later in the article, the reporter referred again to the judge who used the terms *"ruthless"* and *"lack of remorse"* in describing the offender during the sentencing hearing. The picture painted of this woman was that of an 'evil manipulator' whose actions do not represent the characteristics of the 'ideal' woman who is trustworthy and caring.

Another incidence where the 'evil manipulator' narrative was used is seen in the case of a woman who killed a pregnant woman to take her unborn baby. The newspaper reporter wrote: "*The State alleges [she] faked a pregnancy and lured [the victim] to her house, where [the victim] was attacked, bound and killed.* (Molosankwe, 2014f:2). Although the perpetrator was not specifically referred to as 'evil', malicious intent was implied in the use of the word *"lured"*. This narrative infers that this woman overstepped the boundaries of what is considered 'normal' and 'natural' for women. Her behaviour was condemned by the media for transgressing the socially constructed code of female behaviour. Furthermore, the story was sensationalised to catch news consumers' attention as people want to follow the story of a woman who is so 'evil' and 'unnatural'.

Sometimes female perpetrators are not specifically considered as 'evil manipulators', but their deceitful actions are used to describe their attempts to evade detection as seen in this extract: "*She was caught with 1.5kg of cocaine hidden in fake dreadlocks."* (Smillie & Bailey, 2011:1). Although the words *"hidden"* and *"fake"* do indicate deception, in this context, the reporter offered factual information without implying that the woman had a history of manipulative behaviour, or that she had evil intent.

Each of the uses of the 'evil manipulators' narrative described in this section show how South African newspapers focus on how the women used manipulation and lies to lure their victims or cheat the system. However, this was not always used to demonstrate their 'evilness', but when it was, it was to display them as poor examples of the female gender and of their failures to exhibit pro-social feminine behaviours.

Mad Cows

This narrative is based on crime news media's propensity to focus on the mental, emotional, and medical background of offending women (Jewkes, 2015). Jewkes maintained that by way of this narrative, women who do not conform to society's prescription of the gender norm behaviours must be either 'mad' or ill. Their criminal actions are portrayed as a result of a medical or psychiatric issue to protect them from the narrative that exposes them as bad examples of the 'ideal' woman. Similarly, studies have commented on the presence of mental health problems being used to explain why mothers might kill their children (Saavedra & Oliveira, 2017) or to explain female sex offenders (Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012). In this study, I found evidence to support the 'mad cows' narrative in almost half of the study's sample (11 out of 24). However, this narrative was not always used to rationalise women's offending, but rather to portray the woman as essentially 'bad' and fully accountable for her actions.

A journalist reporting on the story of a mother who killed her three children, remarked on the judges' explanation that the woman had suffered a "*major depressive episode. It left her feeling the only solution to her predicament was to kill the children."* (Wilkes, 2014:1). The reference to "a major depressive episode", a serious psychiatric disorder, was used to explain the irrational behaviour that led to the murder of her children. Additionally, another reporter mentioned the woman's "*unhappy childhood", "emotional scarring",* and *"difficulty in forming close relationships"* (SAPA, 2014d:5). In these news articles, the mother was constructed around her mental health problems and personality deficits. It was implied that she cannot be judged for her actions as she had not developed all the characteristics expected of a 'normal' woman such as having close relationships. Essentially, this woman was described as incomplete and imperfect, not through any fault of her own, but as a result of events outside of her control that shaped her personality in her youth. The use of the 'mad cow' narrative here served to protect the social construction of a 'good' woman who is mentally stable. The message that the media sends here is that 'good' women do not commit crimes but that personality deficits and severe mental health conditions might drive them towards crime.

Another example of the ‘mad cow’ narrative is seen in this excerpt: “*she could not be held responsible for her actions due to the side effects of the medication she had taken for a few days leading to the incident and on the day of the killings.* (Venter, 2017d:5). The reporter was referring to the psychiatrist’s testimony on behalf of the woman who shot her two children.

This approach to explaining this woman’s actions suggested that the medication altered her state of mind to such an extent that she could not control her behaviours. By shifting the blame to the effects of the medication, an attempt was made to preserve this woman’s identity as an ‘ideal’ woman because society cannot accept that women can behave criminally, especially not against children.

In these two cases, the ‘mad cows’ narrative was used to elicit sympathy for the offender and could lead the reader to conclude that women do not have criminal tendencies and certainly would not ordinarily act them out. Either way, by depicting female perpetrators in such a way, the South African newspaper crime stories reinforced the notion that criminality is not a natural or ‘normal’ behaviour for women. Rather, the ‘mad cows’ narrative offers a rationalised explanation, as the woman offender must be ‘mad’ or ill. In so doing it protects the social construction of femininity and perpetuates gender stereotyping in crime news media. Furthermore, a sympathetic tone might attract news readers to follow the stories of such women, suggesting that there is an element of newsworthiness when mental health collides with criminal activity and that this opens the door for more sensationalist reporting.

While some newspapers may use the ‘mad cows’ narrative to induce feelings of compassion for women in conflict with the law, others might use it to demonstrate their inherently ‘bad’ natures. In these instances, the focus is thus turned to reflect their inadequacies as women and their failure to meet the required standards as defined by society. The following quotations exemplify this:

> *Details of long-standing substance abuse were also detailed in court yesterday, with hard drugs such as methcathinone (Kat) and binge-drinking being prevalent in [their] relationship* (Koko, 2019b:2).

> *"… [she] said she was so intoxicated she could not foresee what she was doing by hitting [her] with a belt. [The Prosecutor] said it was convenient for the accused not to remember some details pertaining to the incident.* (Dano, 2017a:2).

The above references indicated a clear dismissal of medical or mental health problems as precursors to female offending despite the fact that substance abuse is a mental health problem. Although there was an acknowledgement of mental and emotional instability, it was used to insinuate that these women's history of substance use and abuse made them 'bad' women who were unworthy of sympathy. The message that was delivered was that women who use drugs or drink alcohol are 'bad' and do not represent the stereotypical female. It was because of their history of seemingly bad choices and unstable personalities that their deviant actions were not as shocking as those of women who do fit the archetypal woman.

These contrasting portrayals of women who fit the 'mad cows' narrative show that female offenders are consistently set up against society's definition of the quintessential woman in English South African crime news. Some female offenders are placed against the backdrop of instability, poor judgement, and lack of self-control, and their mental health problems are deemed invalid and used to further vilify them as women. Others are portrayed more sympathetically by using their histories of poor mental health to demonstrate their undeniable femininity which has been damaged by factors outside of their control.

Non-Agent

Jewkes spoke of the narrative 'non-agent' but perhaps it is better referred to as 'lack of agency' which describes women as lacking something. By describing women as lacking agency, the media attempts to reduce the culpability of women and restores the idea of 'ideal' femininity (Jewkes, 2015:151). Some authors explained that crime news media reports tried to rationalise or neutralise the criminal behaviour by emphasising the women's victim status or their unstable emotional or mental states (Noh et al., 2010:113; Carlyle et al., 2014:2410). Other times the blame was attributed to self-defence, or the

offender being coerced by another individual (Noh et al., 2010:120; Carlyle et al., 2014:2410; Hayes & Baker, 2014:6). Niblock (2018:2462) also contended that under some circumstances agency is denied when the media draw attention to the incompetencies of certain professions (health and social services). Furthermore, Jewkes (2015:153) also offered the idea that by employing the 'mythical monsters' narrative, the offender is stripped of her humanity and ultimately her agency. In my study, one-third of the women were portrayed as 'non-agents'. My findings support those of Jewkes (2015), Noh et al. (2010), Carlyle et al. (2014), and Hayes and Baker (2014) by revealing five sub-narratives within the 'non-agent' narrative which include coerced and abused victims, shifting blame to society, dehumanising the offender, and mitigating the offence in terms of mental disturbances.

Victims

My findings indicated that South African newspapers constructed some female offenders as victims in one of two ways – either as coerced victims or abused victims. Women who were portrayed as having been coerced into crime were not considered fully responsible for their actions implying that some other party held a greater degree of guilt, for example:

> *[She] claimed she had become a victim of human trafficking and said she had been "tricked" and "threatened" into committing the crime…* (Kimberley, 2012b:1).
>
> *Many are vulnerable and are coerced, manipulated and lied to. Unbeknown to them, they are recruited for the sole purpose to be arrested as the decoy…* (Sgqolana, 2018:1).

The reporters used words like "tricked", "threatened", "coerced", and "manipulated". to suggest that the women offenders were presented with no alternatives to the criminal behaviour, but were forced by someone else and had limited choice in the matter. They were portrayed as naïve, and with little ability to make decisions without the influence of another person. In this way, free will and agency were stripped from them, not only as women but as humans too.

The abused victim narrative highlights women's histories of being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, and links women's experience of abuse to the psychological impact on their mental states and ultimately their behaviour. One article quoted the attorney of the mother who killed her own son as saying that *She…has been sexually assaulted and exposed to violence all her life."* (Koko, 2019c:4). Another woman who killed her daughter was referred to by the presiding judge as *"a victim of abuse by [him], who physically and emotionally abused her."* (Villette, 2017:5).

These references to abuse instil a sense of sympathy for the women offenders. The abused victim status conjures up images of a defeated and broken woman, different from the portrait of the 'ideal' woman that society has constructed. Furthermore, accountability is minimised by the implication of their victimhood. A portion of the blame is deferred to the abusers who negatively affected these women's lives in such a way that impacted their ability to make socially acceptable choices. This suggests that abused women's decisions to act criminally are influenced by their experiences of abuse.

The narratives built around the female offenders' victim status are by no means trivial and demonstrate the profoundly negative consequences of coercion and abuse on women as individuals. They further highlight the influence people have over each other which is not always good. When women are caught in situations where they are both victims and offenders, society seems to struggle with how to perceive them. On the one hand, they are portrayed as naïve and easily influenced, unable to make decisions for themselves; or they are presented as fragmented and tormented women whose decision-making abilities are deficient as a result of their abuse. Although this 'victim' narrative does, to some extent, mitigate some accountability, it also serves to humanise women who commit crimes by displaying their human fallibility.

Society to Blame

Another way of stripping agency from female perpetrators is seen in the media's propensity to shift blame to social institutions and society at large. Three female offenders were constructed using this narrative in South African newspapers.

The first example incriminates the helping professionals: "*[Her] depression was certainly not assisted by the constant pressure placed on the family by some individuals within the medical profession and social services."* (Beckford & Perthen, 2015:1; Daily Mail, 2015b:8; SAPA, 2014e:1; Wilkes, 2014:1). This quotation implied that the woman might not have committed the crime had she not been failed repeatedly by certain professionals. The statement insinuates that their interference unwittingly precipitated the events that gave rise to the woman's criminal act. As a result, culpability was somewhat shifted away from the offending woman to the professional and social services. Because society is not yet able to comprehend a woman's criminal actions, the narrative of societal blame was more believable. Additionally, by implicating a broader social system in this way, it created sympathy for the offender and a connection to all people who have been treated badly at the hands of similar systems. The story, therefore, becomes more newsworthy as it becomes more personalisable and relatable.

An example of how the South African newspapers highlight the inaction of the community in cases of abuse was noted where the journalist reported on a judge's statement about a woman who killed her child. The reporter wrote that *"[The Judge] yesterday criticised why no family member had done or said anything. She said it was the responsibility of communities to be proactive in situations of abuse."* (Villette, 2017:5). Here, the responsibility was shifted to the family of the offender and the larger community who should have intervened before the situation resulted in the death of a child. The woman was then not solely responsible for the murder as the community also had a role to play. Although her agency was not fully stripped, she and her crime were depicted as by-products of the apparent moral deterioration in communities.

Another way of admonishing society in news media was seen in an article about women who are willing to murder to have a baby. The article focussed on the case of a woman who cut the unborn baby out of its mother's womb and reads: " the *desire to be seen as a normal fertile woman in society, may be what is driving the behaviour"* (Mkize, 2015:6). This highlighted society's expectations of women to be mothers, and when they cannot fill this role, how their value in society is somewhat diminished and the perception is created that there is something wrong with them. In this way, there was a blame shift

where the offender was portrayed as a product of society's unreasonable and irrational beliefs about what 'ideal' womanhood constitutes.

Throughout this paper, I have highlighted South African newspaper journalists' proclivity to portray female offenders in a manner that exacerbates the female gender stereotype of 'ideal' femininity. However, in this case, the newspaper report acknowledged the damage that deeply embedded gender stereotyping can cause. Consistent with Niblock's (2018) study, it is evident that South African newspaper stories sometimes used the 'non-agent' narrative to portray women offenders who have been let down by society. There was an appreciation for a more complex system of influencing factors that are involved when women offend thereby humanising these women and their actions and building stories worth following in the news.

Mental Problems

According to Jewkes (2015:153) and Noh et al. (2010:126), the media sometimes portrays female perpetrators' mental health and emotional problems as mitigating factors in their culpability thereby emphasising their lack of agency. The results of my study supported these findings in articles pertaining to six of the female perpetrators in my sample. Although the previously discussed 'mad cow' narrative was present in 11 of the cases of female perpetrators in my study, only six of these were constructed as 'non-agents' or lacking in agency due to their mental states. For example:

> *… finding that her responsibility and culpability were low in light of her prolonged battle with major depressive episodes… any planning of the murders on [her] part was a product of her mental illness.* (SAPA, 2014d:5).
>
> *[Her] defence is one of sane automatism due to a short lasting psychotic depressive episode with suicide trends.* (Venter, 2017c:5).

These references very clearly attributed the criminal behaviours to diminished capacity based on poor mental health. However, sometimes journalists were more subtle in their approach as seen in the following example:

> *“But the cancer returned, propelling her into a deep depression.” (*Hollands, 2015b:12).

In this reference, the resurgence of a serious medical condition reportedly resulted in an adverse psychiatric response. While it does not state that these issues led directly to the woman’s criminal offence, an undertone of sympathy was created. By using this narrative to evoke sympathy rather than taking a neutral stance, the woman’s health history was shifted into focus rather than the crime. It is this history that then receives partial blame and mitigates the culpability of the offender. Although agency was not fully stripped from this particular offender, the narrative is still evident.

The idea that women, as defined by society, are not capable of committing serious crimes, means that there must be a rational explanation for the phenomenon when it occurs. It is easier for society to accept that mental health problems can be severe enough to break women to the point of criminality, preserving the idea of the archetypal woman. Through this process of safeguarding the notion of the ‘ideal’ woman, the offending women who do not fit the stereotypical profile are stripped of agency. They are portrayed as fractured victims of their mental health circumstances.

In contrast to portrayals of non-agency by means of ‘madness’, Cavaglion (2008) noted that not all female offenders are afforded this exemption of responsibility. The following quote illustrates that South African newspapers also report on the rejection of the mental defence:

> *[She] had pleaded not guilty, claiming that she has no recollection of what happened. However, the judge rejected her defence.* (Molosankwe, 2014i:6).

The newspaper article reported that the offending woman’s claims of a medical or mental health condition as a mitigating factor to her crime was ultimately denied. As a woman who committed a violent act by murdering her two children, who had no history of abuse, or mental health problems, and was not coerced, society struggles to comprehend her actions. Ultimately, she is cast aside and considered to be a poor reflection of her gender and essentially ‘bad’.

My findings were consistent with that of Jewkes (2015) and Noh et al. (2010). Newspaper stories in South Africa have depicted some female offenders as being controlled by their psychiatric and mental problems and therefore lacking free will and agency. However, sometimes a denial of this narrative exists for some women perpetrators when there appears to be little to no evidence to substantiate their mental health issues. Either way, these depictions of female perpetrators bring to the fore the matter of 'ideal' femininity and how society accepts that some women represent this ideal more than others.

Not Human

Jewkes (2015:153) held that news media occasionally portray women as 'not human' to explain their offences because 'normal' women would not resort to such crimes. Similar to the 'mythical monsters' theme, their humanity is stripped and in so doing, their agency. My study found only one use of the 'not human' narrative in which the female perpetrator's crime was met with disbelief. The journalist highlighted the advocate's inference that the mother who tortured and murdered her child was not human when he stated that the crime was *"beyond the realms of what we thought human beings are capable of*." (Koko, 2019:c). As a result, she is not an agent of the human race and by extension not a woman by society's definition.

In essence, the 'non-agent' narrative, as conceptualised by Jewkes (2015) and supported by Noh et al. (2010), Carlyle et al. (2014), Hayes and Baker (2014), and Niblock (2018), was present in South African newspaper stories of women in conflict with the law reviewed in my study. The media, in its efforts to describe female offenders sometimes resorted to using narratives that portray such women as not fully responsible because of their victimhood, mental and emotional states, or non-humanness. These narratives served to further promote female gender stereotyping by implying that the archetypal woman cannot commit a crime unless there is some other driving force that she is not in control of. Whether it is her history of abuse, the coercion of another, her mental health, or that she does not represent the human race, her actions are not her own and the identity of the 'ideal' woman remains protected.

5.2. New-found Narratives

My study has so far revealed that Jewkes' (2015) eight narratives are present in South African newspaper stories of female offenders and their crimes. In addition to these narratives, two additional narratives appeared in my study namely, 'cultural aberrations' and 'social status'.

Cultural Aberrations

International literature suggested that crime news reporting often displays elements of racial and ethnic inequalities (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Colburn & Melander, 2018; Deckert, 2020; Slakoff, 2020). However, there was no mention of women perpetrators who do not conform to specific cultural expectations. The distinction is made here that race and ethnicity are physical and biological whereas culture is based on shared beliefs, traditions, rituals, and practices.

Two of the 24 women in my data set were reported as acting in contradiction of their cultural norms, not only by committing crimes but by virtue of the types of crimes they committed or their behaviours after the commission of the crimes. In the first case discussed here, the woman in question was found guilty of livestock theft. The reporter quotes the state prosecutor saying: "*I have never heard of it. The case of [her] is the first of its kind I am dealing with… It is only the time of lobola*[15] *and weddings that women feature chiefly on issues of cattle"* (Mthatha, 2020d:2). This statement suggests that the woman was a cultural anomaly as women in her culture are only involved in the procurement or management of livestock during discussions of *lobola,* and suggests that women do not commit livestock theft. Her involvement in the stock theft crime was met with shock and disbelief which highlights the strongly enforced gender roles of this particular culture. What was also detected here is a hint of cultural inequality. In other words, if this woman was from a different cultural community, her criminal offence might

[15] Much like a dowry, lobola is a traditional African practice whereby the groom's family pay the bride's family an amount in cash or livestock before the wedding. Note that not all African cultures follow this practice.

not have had the same shock value to the prosecutor who is quoted. It is possible that the story may not even have met the threshold for newsworthiness.

In addition to highlighting women's roles in cultural practices, South African media also emphasises women's cultural deviance by highlighting the way they present themselves by how they dress or behave. An example of this narrative was seen in this reporter's opening line: "*A day after [he] was gunned down his wife had acted "strange "— with cultural insensitivity she was wearing an offensive mini skirt and sleeveless top when her in-laws arrived to comfort her."* (Jacob, 2020b:1). The reference to the perpetrator's behaviour and appearance indicates that it was not in accordance with the customs of her cultural heritage. The article suggested that women in her culture are supposed to mourn and dress in a particular way as prescribed by their customs and traditions. This woman had done more than being involved in a violent crime. She had violated the norms of her culture as well as her gender role within the culture.

Every culture has its traditional practices and social norms that inform its day-to-day living. Embedded in these are the gender-specific roles and expectations that guide social interactions. When women choose to breach these sets of cultural rules, they are guilty of more than just a criminal offence, but they are also guilty of contravening the role of women in the culture's construction of gender.

The deviation from traditional cultural gender roles was pivotal in how these two women's stories were told and sensationalised. In addition to being depicted as poor examples of the female gender and as criminals, these women were portrayed as anomalies of their culture and condemned as cultural aberrations. In a multicultural society such as South Africa, with a history of marginalisation and racial stereotyping, certain cultural groups may fear that they will be misrepresented and further ostracised when 'their' women commit crimes. It stands to reason that emphasising such women's violations of their cultural norms is an attempt to distance the culture from the women and their crimes to protect the culture's identity as a whole.

Social Status

Jewkes' didn't mention the media's attention to women's careers or levels of education. However, Collins (2016:305) argued that compared to male offenders, women perpetrators' jobs were rarely given any notice in crime news reports. Carlyle et al. (2014:2409) contended that some offending women's seemingly traditional jobs, such as teaching or carer roles, were used as a mechanism to portray them as unnatural women who crossed the boundaries of their jobs. My study found that careers and level of education as indicators of social status were used when describing 58 per cent (14 out of 24) of the women included in this sample. This suggested that not only was the narrative present but also that it was very important in South African newspaper crime stories featuring female perpetrators. There were at least eight different ways that this narrative was employed in a manner which may have served to humanise these women.

South African newspapers used the 'social status' narrative to highlight the offending women's reputable careers as a juxtaposition against their crimes. One example was that of a policewoman's involvement in a drug-related offence. The news article reads: "*She has been a member of the SAPS for 11 years"* (Ntuli, 2015:8). The article further quoted the woman's best friend saying *"She knew the law and wouldn't have risked getting arrested because she was very proud of her clean record."* In this article, there was clear disbelief and denial that a woman who is expected to uphold the law was capable of committing a crime because the two cannot co-exist. The fact that the woman was a member of the police force made the story all the more newsworthy and the betrayal of her position as a law enforcer was sensationalised and used against her.

Sometimes the South African media may focus on women's failure to meet the standards of their professions as noted by this example: "*THE TRIAL* [original emphasis] *of nurse [name], the mother accused of smothering her 7-year-old son at a guest house in uMhlanga."* (Masuku, 2019b:4). From this quote, we see how the newspaper reporter used the accused offender's career as a nurse to demonstrate her social status and ultimately her failure to uphold the code of her profession and society's construction of motherhood. Rather than caring and protecting the victim, the woman was portrayed as having transgressed her professional and gender roles in multiple ways.

South African news reporters may also use women's conventional careers to portray them as 'normal' women whose crimes are out of character. For example:

> *[She] was a PA [personal assistant] at the… auditing firm.* (Nini, 2019:2).
>
> *[She] worked as a sales rep for an East London courier company.* (Hollands, 2015a:3).
>
> *[She], was a talented graphic designer.* (Williams, 2014:7).
>
> *She is also said to have run a catering company."* (Bailey, 2011:3).

While the details about their jobs are not important in terms of the crimes they committed, the media used them to normalise these women and make them relatable to news consumers. In so doing, these women became newsworthy as they were deemed interesting to news readers who seek to understand how such 'typical' women resort to committing crimes.

The next examples of South African newspapers' usage of the 'social status' narrative demonstrated how the level of education is given priority in some cases. In the first instance a woman convicted of drug smuggling was reported to have "s*tudied at the Victoria Girls' High School in Grahamstown before enrolling for a BA at Wits in 2007."* (Bailey, 2011:3). From this, it was indicated that the woman aspired to gain tertiary education and ultimately employment in a reputable field. However, in this case, she did not complete her degree. By reporting on the woman's incomplete studies, coupled with her drug-related offence, a negative impression is created where the previously 'ideal' modern woman was no longer 'good enough' to represent the social construction of womanhood. However, as the story unfolded in the news, it was reported that "*She is in the second year of her communication studies with Unisa, which also earned her a job teaching prison authorities English this year.*" (DDR. 2014:6). A wholly different picture was created regarding this convicted perpetrator where newsreaders were offered information about her rehabilitation. Through rising above the challenging challenges, her identity as an 'ideal' woman has been restored. This woman's story, which spanned almost a decade, showed how the South African media kept it relevant by focusing on her continued education and involvement in educational programs in prison.

Another way in which the ‘social status’ narrative was used is in the case of a woman who had killed her two sons. The article referred to a description of her as “*a highly educated woman and married to a psychiatrist” (Venter, 2017c:5).* Not only was her education important, but her husband’s profession was also mentioned. Two things are noted here. In the first instance, by highlighting the offender’s high level of education, it was implied that she is a model example of what women should strive towards. In the second instance, by including her husband’s career in the story, but not referring to her specific career, it was implied that her qualification and job were secondary to that of her husband. It also subtly suggests that her role as a mother is more important while her husband should be the provider. This type of gender-role stereotyping in the news report shows how the media encourages outdated gender role descriptions to construct women accused of crimes.

In the case of a woman arrested for drug smuggling, the news article quoted a community member saying that the woman was *“a quiet person but changed when she was in high school when she started smoking and drinking and that led to dropping out of school before she could reach her matric.”* (Sgqolana, T. 2018:1). This offered a negative view of the woman as the article inferred that her history of substance abuse coupled with her failure to complete her formal schooling career, resulted in her offending behaviour. It reflects the community’s disappointment in her actions which did not represent their values and norms. In this way, she was constructed as a ‘bad’ woman in the eyes of her community thereby demonstrating the gender stereotyping in South African newspaper journalism.

There were also times when South African newspaper journalists used unemployment as an indicator of failing to meet society’s expectations. For example: *“the unemployed [woman] paid [him] R150 000 for killing her husband.” (*Mukhutu, 2017b.2). According to the police officer quoted in the story, the woman paid the man using money obtained from the life insurance policy that paid out after her husband’s death. The article suggested that because of her unemployment and poverty, she resorted to murder as a means of financial wealth. She was portrayed as a ‘bad wife’, an ‘evil manipulator’ who does not meet society’s expectations of being a contributing member of society.

The last example of how the ‘social status’ narrative was used is in the case of a well-known public figure in South Africa. Although she has never been formally charged for her role in the death of her intimate partner, many have questioned her involvement in the crime. Of the 12 articles that discussed the matter, 11 of them referred to her as either a singer, actress, or musician (Matlhare, 2013:2; SAPA., 2014c:1; Anon., 2016:4; Mbangeni, 2016:1; Majola, 2016:3; Zeeman, 2018:5; Entertainment Reporter, 2019:3; Fredericks, C. 2019:13; Entertainment Reporter, 2020:16; Mahamba, 2020:1; Mlambo, 2020:3). Her celebrity status is therefore central to her identity. Unlike the previous examples of the media’s attention to the careers or education of female offenders, this particular case does not portray the woman’s career as it concerns her role as a woman. The journalists detailing the case seemed to rely more on the news value of the celebrity status of the suspected offender and the victim than they did on the gender role. Ultimately, the ‘social status’ narrative, although used frequently in reporting on female offenders’ crime stories, may not always be used to perpetuate society’s gender stereotyping.

An underlying message is also sent that women who commit crimes are of lower social standing. They are juxtaposed against women who have succeeded in obtaining a higher social status by completing their education and securing work. Such news reporting misrepresents the reality of socio-political problems such as low education, and high unemployment and poverty rates in South Africa. It creates the impression that women of higher social status do not commit crimes thereby separating offending women and non-offending women based on their education and socio-economic standing. In doing so, the ‘social status’ narrative shows that education and employment have become important factors in defining the ‘ideal’ woman even in the face of the reality that a large portion of society has not completed their basic education or are unemployed.

5.3. Different Crime, Different Narrative

International scholars have explored the media’s portrayals of female perpetrators of violent crimes and crimes against children but there is no academic discourse regarding the media construction of the stories of women accused of drug-related crimes and

financial crimes. Furthermore, there has been no comparison of how different narratives are applied to different crime types. Table 9 (Chapter 4 section 4.2) shows how South African newspapers portray women differently depending on the type of crimes they have committed. In this section, I discuss how my study's findings relate to previous research, and it also explores the results pertaining to the narratives used in drug-related crimes and financial crimes.

Violent Crimes and Crimes Against Children

Numerous authors have described how women who murder their intimate partners are portrayed as bad, manipulative, vengeful, adulterous, monsters, mentally unstable, victims, and not always responsible for their actions (Noh et al., 2010; Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010; Carlyle et al., 2014; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Collins, 2016). Only one source has found evidence of the media's inclusion of details about female offenders' social status by referring to their jobs (Carlyle et al., 2014). My study confirmed that South African newspapers constructed women accused of violent offences in a similar way and tended to focus heavily on depicting them as 'bad wives' and 'evil manipulators'. South African newspapers also used the 'physical attractiveness' (appearance) narrative to portray them as lacking remorse. The 'cultural anomalies' narrative was also employed to describe violent female offenders as non-representative of their cultural norms.

The literature further indicates that women who commit crimes against children have typically been portrayed in the news media as mentally unstable, sexually deviant, 'bad' mothers, non-agents by way of blaming society, or are dehumanised (Cavaglion, 2008; Jewkes, 2015; Saavedra & Oliveira, 2017; Niblock, 2018). The findings of my study mostly correlated with the findings of these authors with the exception of the 'sexuality and sexual deviance' narrative which did not feature in my study's results. This omission is explained by the fact that none of the offenders representing this crime category in my study were accused of sexual offences. In addition to the narratives identified in previous studies, my study found that South African newspaper journalists also described these female offenders as 'evil manipulators' and 'good wives', as well as referring to their 'physical attractiveness' (appearance) and 'social status'.

The use of the ‘evil manipulators’ narrative in South African newspaper constructions of women who harm children did not refer to their manipulation of the children but rather to their deceit in efforts to cover up their crimes. When South African newspapers used the ‘good wives’, ‘physical attractiveness’ (appearance), or ‘social status’ narratives, it was to portray them as ‘typical’ mothers because they were educated, had respectable jobs, and dressed and behaved as society would expect from ‘normal’ woman and mothers. However, another woman was described as *“unemployed” (*Dano, 2017b:2) and therefore less than the ‘ideal’ woman. Her status as unemployed infers poverty which was then used to explain how economic pressures may have precipitated the murder of her child. Additionally, there was an undertone of classicism, inferring that women of lower social status are more deviant and likely to consider crime as a way out of their circumstances.

International and South African crime news media use a variety of narratives to construct and sensationalise the stories of women accused of violent crimes and crimes against children. As a result, these women are misrepresented and pitted against the norms which society has prescribed for women. Furthermore, South African news consumers are offered skewed perspectives of the nature and prevalence of women who commit such crimes.

Financial Crimes

South African newspapers were not shown to describe female perpetrators in this crime category in terms of their sexuality, appearance, or roles as mothers or wives, and they are not portrayed as ‘mad cows’, ‘mythical monsters’, or non-agents. While the former four narratives might be considered irrelevant factors in the crimes, it was particularly interesting that poor mental health and lack of agency were not considered mitigating factors in the commission of their offences. What this implies is that women who committed financial crimes were held fully responsible for their crimes. The results of my investigation indicated that female offenders of financial crimes have been portrayed by at least three different narratives in SA newspapers namely: ‘evil manipulators’, ‘cultural pariahs’ and ‘social status’.

South African newspapers used the terms "*masterminding", "manipulated", "misrepresenting", "misleading", 'deceit", "dishonesty",* and *"less-than-honest*" to describe women who committed financial crimes as 'evil manipulators'. (Peters, 2011:5; Villette, & Adriaanse, 2018:1; Nini, 2019.:2; Feni, 2020a:2; Feni, 2020b:2; Feni, 2020c:2; Mthatha, 2020a:2; Mthatha, 2020b:3; Mthatha, 2020c:2; Mthatha, 2020d:2; Mthatha, 2020e:2; Mthatha, 2020f:2). This was not surprising as fraud is a premeditated crime and involves deception and manipulation. Therefore, the use of this narrative is not necessarily a tool to reinforce gender stereotypes, but rather it is used to demonstrate that these women represent the quintessential financial crime offender. The 'social status' narrative was used to reinforce this criminal stereotyping by emphasising these women's greed and untrustworthiness.

Effectively, South African newspapers portray female perpetrators of financial crimes as manipulative, culturally deviant, and greedy for wealth. They are held fully accountable for their actions and any contextual factors are not reported in the news coverage. What is also noteworthy is the lack of personal details regarding these women which may result in their crimes being less sensational, less newsworthy, and therefore somewhat less biased although not completely impartial either. This finding is novel and unique in that no previous studies have considered the narratives used in media regarding female financial crime offenders.

Drug-Related Crimes

Women implicated in drug-related offences were described using only five of the ten narratives in South African English newspapers. They did not appear to report on their sexualities or deviances in sexual activities, their roles as wives or mothers, nor did they depict them as 'monsters' or 'outcasts' of their cultural heritage. The South African newspaper journalists did, however, use narratives such as 'physical attractiveness', 'mad cows', 'evil manipulators', 'non-agents' and 'social status'.

The 'social status' narrative was most prevalent and found to describe all four of the women in this crime category. Their education and careers were central to their stories as the media mostly portrayed them as 'typical' women who had some social standing by

having completed their education and secured employment. It can be said that the South African newspaper journalists' emphasis on education and careers sends the message that anyone, regardless of their level of social status can be involved in drug trafficking as mules.

South African newspapers also focussed a lot on these women's victimhood and mental health problems to hint at their lack of agency in their drug offences. More specifically, the narrative has been created around the explanation that these offending women were coerced or forced into their crimes, mitigates their responsibility to some degree. By employing this narrative, accountability has been directed to the drug-trafficking syndicates and their members rather than blaming the women for their actions.

Women's 'physical attractiveness' or appearance was used to depict them either as 'normal' women who do not look like drug offenders, or as 'odd-looking' women who fit the picture of someone involved with drugs. The implication is that drug offenders or drug mules are easily identifiable from non-offenders. As a form of criminal profiling, this view of females accused of drug-related crimes served to misrepresent the reality of drug trafficking.

The 'evil manipulator' narrative was loosely used in six different articles to describe one offender who was reported to have hidden drugs in her "*fake dreadlocks"* (Anon., 2011b:4; Bailey, 2011:3; Smillie & Bailey, 2011:1; Kimberley, 2012c; Medley & Fabricius, 2012:2; Harvey, 2019b:2). Although she was not specifically considered 'evil', her attempts to evade detection were notably newsworthy based on how many times it was mentioned across the articles. This piece of information was sensationalised and used to capture the attention of newsreaders and created the impression that this woman knew what she was doing was wrong and was therefore responsible for her actions.

The narratives employed by South African newspapers regarding women who commit drug-related crimes showed that the media has some fascination with their stories. In many ways, it is these women's conforming to societal expectations of their gender roles that subtly served to reinforce these stereotypes. For example, they were women who held conventional jobs, were educated, looked 'normal', and were easily manipulated due to their naivety and compliant nature.

5.4. Summary of Findings

To summarise, my study confirmed that South African newspapers do make use of each of Jewkes' eight narratives, as well as depicting women against their social status and cultural belonging. The most prevalent narratives in the South African newspapers in my sample included 'evil manipulators', 'social status', 'mad cows', and 'non-agents'. Female offenders were least likely to be constructed using the 'mythical monsters' and 'sexuality and sexual deviance' narratives. Some deviations in how these narratives were employed in South African newspapers were noted by how 'physical attractiveness' was used to humanise female offenders or to demonstrate their emotional states. Although women perpetrators were sometimes referred to as 'bad wives' or 'bad mothers', South African newspapers sometimes used a contrasting narrative that constructed offending women as 'good'. What was also seen is that South African newspapers showed a tendency to overemphasise certain narratives with the intent to sensationalise the women's stories ultimately misrepresenting them and their crimes.

My findings also showed that women who commit different types of crimes are constructed differently in the news. Female perpetrators of violent crimes and crimes against children received the most attention from South African newspapers in this study, and their stories were more sensationalised as evidenced by the larger number of narratives used. Female drug offenders and women involved in financial crimes were given less attention and fewer details were provided in the newspaper stories. Women who committed violent crimes were likely to be portrayed as sexually deviant, culturally insensitive, lacking in remorse, 'monsters', manipulators, 'bad wives', 'mad', or lacking agency. South African newspapers tended to describe female perpetrators of crimes against children, as 'normal' women (appearance), 'good' – and 'bad mothers', monsters, manipulators, psychologically unstable, and not entirely responsible for their actions. Although their sexuality and cultural heritage were not reported in the articles I analysed, a larger sample size may have indicated that these narratives are sometimes present. Female offenders of financial crimes were only reported as 'evil manipulators' and 'cultural aberrations'. Again, a larger sample of newspapers or offender stories might suggest otherwise. Lastly, women's involvement in drug-related crimes conjured depictions of them as victims rather than offenders. It was also implied that apparently

‘normal’ women (educated, have respectable jobs, conventional appearance) may fall victim to drug-trafficking syndicates, or that they are not fully responsible due to poor mental health or lack of education. Manipulation and ‘abnormal’ appearance were sometimes reported to make examples of these women who do not fit society’s construction of ‘ideal’ femininity.

The strong presence of the ‘social status’ narrative in South African crime news highlights that this is an important factor in how women of different social and economic standings are discriminated against in the media. Women of higher social status may be described in either positive or negative terms, whereas those who represent a lower social status are only depicted negatively. With these discrepancies in reporting the stories of female offenders in SA media, we see the complex merging of gender and class stereotyping. In modern times gender equality has allowed women to gain an education and get a job and this is what society has come to expect. However, this is an unrealistic expectation in SA where poverty often stands in the way of gaining an education, and unemployment rates are high for both men and women. Still, when women do not uphold these expectations of the ‘ideal’ woman who is empowered with an education and a career, she is considered less-than-ideal and not an ambassador for the female gender. This type of reporting perpetuates not only gender role stereotyping but also insinuates that women of a lower social standing are more likely to be involved in criminal activity thereby supporting social-economic discrimination.

Ultimately, female perpetrators are consistently set up against the backdrop of the social construction of ‘ideal’ femininity as the media struggles to comprehend their crimes. Multiple narratives are used, and sometimes change as the story unfolds in the news. By using so many different narratives to construct female offenders in South African newspapers, we see how their stories are sensationalised with a focus placed on irrelevant information that results in biased reporting and the potential spreading of misinformation that skews the reality of female offending.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Female offenders represent a small portion of the inmate population globally and in South Africa. Typically, women in South Africa are incarcerated for violent, economic, narcotics, and sex crimes (Artz et al. 2012; Steyn & Booyens, 2017). Their involvement in criminal activity has sparked interest, not only among academics but also in the media. While the former compile research reports for other academics and policymakers, the latter publish news reports for public consumption. Numerous researchers have scrutinised the media's constructions of female offenders and have come to some consensus that these women are portrayed as 'mad', 'sad', or 'bad' (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Grabe, Trager, Lear; & Rauch, 2006; Cavaglion, 2008; Brennan & Vanderberg, 2009; Noh et al., 2010; Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010; Evans, 2012; Landor & Eisenchlas, 2012; Carlyle, et al., 2014; Hayes & Baker, 2014; Jewkes, 2015); Collins, 2016; Saavedra & Oliveira, 2017; Christensen, 2018; Colburn & Melander, 2018; Niblock, 2018; Pelvin, 2019; Deckert, 2020; Slakoff, 2020). According to Jewkes (2015:135-154), the media may portray female offenders by focusing on their 'sexuality and sexual deviance', and 'physical attractiveness', or may label them as 'bad wives', 'bad mothers', 'mythical monsters', 'evil manipulators', 'mad cows', and 'non-agents'. However, no research had investigated whether Jewkes' typologies fit South African women offenders, or how such narratives may be used in the context of different crimes. My study aimed to fill this knowledge gap and demonstrate how South African newspapers construct female offenders and the implications this has for the misrepresentation of female offenders and their crimes.

My findings show support for Jewkes' eight narratives in South African newspaper crime stories about female offenders, but not necessarily in the way that Jewkes sets out. While Jewkes offers the idea that crime news media tends to portray wives and mothers very negatively and as 'bad', newspapers in this sample were just as likely to use the 'good' narrative too. Another way that South African newspapers deviated slightly from Jewkes' proffering is seen in the 'physical attractiveness' and 'evil manipulators 'narratives. South African newspapers tended to focus more on appearance than attractiveness. Women

offenders' clothes or demeanour seemed more important as this helped to identify them as either 'normal' women or as defying society's expectations. It is likely that this diversion from Jewkes' narrative is related to the fact that my study omits sexually-based offences where physical attractiveness may be more relevant to report.

Two additional narratives used by South African media in their constructions of female offenders are presented in my report, namely 'social status' and 'cultural aberrations'. Although the former has been reported by Carlyle et al. (2014), Jewkes did not include it in her exploration of the media's portrayals of female criminality. In South African newspapers, the focus is placed on women's jobs and levels of education when reporting on their crimes. South African newspapers are, therefore, apparently promoting and celebrating this gender role advancement, even among offending women. However, when female criminals did not have either of these accolades, they were portrayed as being of a lower social status and less-than-ideal in their representation of society's 'ideal' woman.

While other researchers have found racial and ethnic discrimination in crime news media (Brennan & Vandenberg, 2009; Colburn & Melander, 2018; Deckert, 2020; Slakoff, 2020), in my study, there no evidence exists to suggest that South African newspapers discriminate in this way when reporting on women implicated in a crime. That is not to say that such narratives are not present in South African news media more generally. It is possible such constructions of female offenders might be present in other newspaper houses or may be seen in stories covering other crime categories not included in my study. Similarly, the racial/ethnic element might present itself in newspaper articles covering male-perpetrated crimes, or even adolescents and children who offend.

Although racial and ethnic discrepancies were not evident in my study, South African crime news media does mention women perpetrators as 'cultural aberrations'. The presence of this narrative in South African crime news indicates the importance of cultural heritage in defining social and gender roles. Furthermore, in a space like South Africa which has a history of cultural discrimination, this emphasis also serves to distance the culture as a whole from the women who do not represent their values and norms. With this separation of the two, the culture can maintain its identity and not be labelled as a

deviant group. These political undertones are extremely intricate and worth further investigation in terms of crime reporting in South Africa and globally.

My study has also shown that women who commit different crime types are constructed very differently in South African newspaper stories. More attention is given to women who commit violent crimes and crimes against children than women implicated in drug-related and financial crimes. The reason for this is that the former two types of offences encapsulate more news values than the latter two making them more newsworthy. As a result, they are more likely to attract and maintain news consumers' attention. Similarly, the more news values are present in the stories, the more sensationalised the reporting style becomes which in turn attracts even more attention. These discrepancies in how women involved in different crime types are portrayed go on to misrepresent the issue of crime and female-perpetrated crime. Regardless of the crime statistics, newsreaders are led to conclusions about crime and female criminality based on sensationalised (mis)information.

Across the findings of my study, three key themes seem to form the crux of the issue of crime news media in South Africa: (1) newsworthiness, (2) sensationalism, and (3) gender role stereotyping. Female offending is considered to be a rare occurrence when one looks at official incarceration statistics, and as a result, these stories are automatically deemed newsworthy. But what makes one woman's crime story more newsworthy than another's? The more news values[16] that can be identified in the story, the more newsworthy it becomes. So, when a woman's crime involves violence, sex, or children, or she has high social status, or the crime is considered novel, or if the story can be easily simplified and made relatable, the story is likely to be printed (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:53; Chibnall, 1977; Greer, 2007; Allan, 2010; Jewkes, 2015:46). By this description, it is easy to see why crimes against children and violent crimes are so quickly printed and how a multitude of narratives are used to sensationalise the events. However, in my study, several stories of women involved in financial crimes and drug-related crimes demonstrated how news values really elevate the story's newsworthiness. For example, the woman accused of

[16] News values include violence, social status, simplification, individualisation or personalisation, proximity and cultural relevance, graphic imagery, sex, crimes involving children, and novelty of the crime (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:53; Chibnall, 1977; Greer, 2007; Allan, 2010; Jewkes, 2015:46).

stock theft was reported to be the first known woman to commit such a crime within the context of her cultural heritage. This particular story reflects how the novelty of her offence, her gender, and her culture increased her story's value. Another example was when celebrity status was used to increase the value of the story as in the case of a female celebrity who was implicated in the murder of her lover. While there was no reported evidence that she was involved, and she was never formally arrested, the media gave the story a lot of attention and interviewed countless friends and family members, and even printed snippets from social media reactions. South African newspapers also deem stories newsworthy when the reporters can capitalise on personalising female perpetrators' stories to make them more relatable. In other words, when a perpetrator is portrayed as a 'typical' woman who dresses and behaves as society expects, has an education and a career, and is a 'good' mother or wife, she represents the quintessential woman. The idea is that by reporting on these aspects of female offenders, news consumers will want to follow the story to try to understand how seemingly 'normal' women could get involved in criminal activity.

But what is the point of reporting these women's offences and what is to be gained from it? It may be argued that the point is to provide the public with information about crime so that they are informed of current events. However, the issue is, that by only choosing stories deemed newsworthy and then sensationalising the details that are presented, the news media misrepresents female offenders. In South African newspapers, certain aspects of the crime and offender are overemphasised while other details are overlooked, and the truth is rarely brought to the fore. At the cost of quality and accurate reporting, South African newspapers have turned to sensationalist reporting in their competing efforts to gain and maintain readership with the ultimate goal of increasing profits (Bernstein, 1992:24; Barak, 1998:569; Marsh & Melville, 2019:262; Ngange & Elempia, 2019:1). As a result, the news articles do not reflect the reality of female offending in South Africa, and news readers are offered partial and irrelevant details that limit their ability to make informed judgements of such women. The unfortunate result of this is that the public is not better informed about crime than before they receive the information in the news. In fact, they are worse off as gender and criminal stereotyping are perpetuated through such sensationalist and biased reporting.

South African women are consistently placed against society's construction of the 'ideal' woman. If they offend, they are portrayed as 'bad' women who have transgressed the sacred limits of their gender roles. They are no longer good enough to represent the female gender and are cast out with no hope of redemption. However, on the other hand, female offenders may still maintain their 'good' woman identity when society can attribute their crimes to histories of abuse or mental health difficulties, or to the fact that they were 'good' mothers and wives. Although they are not 'ideal' South African women, they are good enough. Because the news media is largely the public's source of information about topics such as crime, this perpetual gender role stereotyping has damaging effects, especially in an age where gender is no longer fixed and binary. Essentially, in this larger context of gender fluidity, South African media is demonstrating its rigidity and inability to accept and support current gender movements, especially in the reporting of crime news.

In reflecting on the findings of this research and the implications of the media's negative influence on society's understanding of the issue of female criminality, I acknowledge that the media has the power to rectify this too. As easy as it is to sensationalise stories of crime and women who commit a crime, it should be as easy to offer responsible and accurate reporting that reflects reality. Somewhere along the way, news has become a commodity. Reality and truth are not valued as much as the money that sensationalised stories produce. This is creating a crisis in the attainment of knowledge and someone needs to be held accountable for perpetuating misinformation, misrepresentation, and ultimately the social and gender divide. This responsibility of holding the media accountable for their actions lies with each and every news consumer who has to ask whether the information being received is accurate, reliable, and free from bias.

Recommendations for future research include different methodological approaches that may include quantitative methods, alternative qualitative methods, a wider range of newspapers and media types, a more inclusive language base, and more crime categories. Studies examining the differences in how narratives are applied to male and female offenders are also encouraged. A Southern perspective on how gender roles in a variety of cultural groups are portrayed differently in crime news may also yield valuable results. The academic sphere would also benefit from exploring how sensationalist reporting styles affect the perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge of crime in South Africa.

Lastly, future studies may ask how news reporters perceive their role in providing accurate and reliable information, as well as whether they acknowledge their accountability in spreading misinformation to their news consumers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One: Ethical Clearance Certificate

Faculty of Law: Research Ethics Committee

Private Bag X3 ▪ Rondebosch ▪ 7701 ▪ South Africa
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Certificate of Approval for Ethical Clearance

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/SUPERVISOR: KELLEY MOULT STUDENT: CARLA VAN ZIJL **[VZJCAR002]** FACULTY: LAW DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC LAW	**ETHICS REFERENCE NUMBER: L0192-2021** ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 18-NOVEMBER-2021 APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 17-NOVEMBER-2022

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring South African English Print Media Constructions of Female Offenders.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH: The proposed research forms part of the requirement for the degree of MPhil Criminology, Law and Society. The proposed study is to explore and describe how the SA print media portrays female offenders of a variety of crime types using a particular set of narratives as a point of evaluation.

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a formal "Request for a Modification" to the REC Administrative Office. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You are responsible for submitting this by at least 2 months prior to the expiry date of clearance date issued.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please formally notify the REC: Law as well as your supervisor where applicable.

Certification

This certifies that the University of Cape Town Law Faculty's Research Ethics Committee has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Cape Town Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

pp

Dr Shane Godfrey
LAW REC: LEAD REVIEWER

Certificate Issued On: 23/11/2021