

SHE JUST SNAPPED: REALITY TELEVISION, MURDER AND THE MYTH OF
FEMININE EVIL

by

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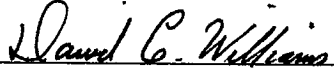
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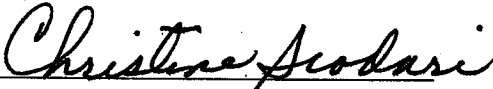
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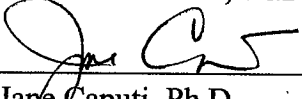
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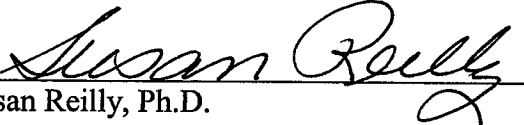
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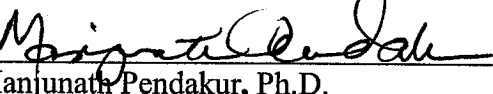
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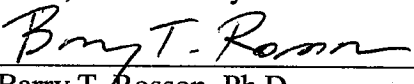

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ABSTRACT

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Snapped, a documentary style show profiling female killers, is one of Oxygen's longest running hit franchises. This thesis analyzes, through both the frames of feminist theory and rhetoric, the way the show perpetuates and plays upon the myth of feminine evil as well as the stereotype of women as weak, hysterical agents in need of control. *Snapped* showcases women who start out as seemingly normal but then enact horrendous crimes. The use of women that the audience can identify with but then later fear creates a cathartic experience in which female audience members can be vicariously cleansed of any dangerous animosity they may possess. The show portrays the many extreme examples as the norm for lethal female violence, but this disregards the fact that a majority of women killers act in self defense. The show distorts the reality of violence against women and supports a stereotype of inherent female criminality.

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INTRODUCTION

Oxygen's website states "[e]ach year, approximately 16,000 people are murdered in the United States. 7% of the killers are female." And it is this seven percent that are investigated in the documentary style reality show *Snapped*. Murder has always been an act that has mostly been within the domains of masculinity. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics 88.8% of murders are committed by men while females make up only 11.2% of murder perpetrators ("Homicide Trends in the U.S.", 2010)¹. Rarely do we think of women as having the ability – whether it is the aggression, hate or pure physical strength – to commit such a violent and heinous act. The act of murder is one that is seen as deviant within our society but the small number of female killers, as the statistic used by Oxygen attests to, only makes females that much more deviant, not only as societal deviants but as gender deviants as well.

The double deviance of these women is part of the appeal of the show. These women are unthinkable existences in our world. Each half an hour episode portrays one woman's life prior to her "snapping" and the ultimate consequences of that action. The show starts by narrating the woman's upbringing, family and early history before she ends up meeting – and more commonly marrying – the man she will eventually kill. All

¹ Oxygen's website states that its information is based on "figures from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program" which is why there may be a slight discrepancy in the actual number of female murderers but regardless of the difference it is clear that women acting out in violence that leads to murder is extremely rare and this is what makes this show significant enough for examination.

the women chosen for the show are “subjects the average viewer can relate to” according to the show’s producer, at least to a certain extent (as cited in Kingston, 2008 p.121). The “snapped” woman’s middle class upbringings and common struggles create an intended connection between the audience and the “snapped” woman, but that connection is violently shattered when the woman enacts the most atrocious crime possible. This crime is particularly heinous because of the gender deviance it showcases since a woman is supposed to be docile *and* she is killing someone who - by patriarchal standards - is considered to be superior to her. The show then transitions into the trial phase of the episode in which every lurid and gender deviant detail of the woman’s life is laid out on the table for the “shock and awe” of the viewing audience. The show then runs into another problem when the trial makes apparent that the woman never “snapped” but planned the entire thing. There was no “breaking point” for any of these women; each just saw what she wanted and knew the man in her life was in the way. All the murders shown are calculated and well planned. For some of the crimes, it took years to find all the evidence to prove what happened since many of the women went to great lengths to prevent their crimes from having an obvious perpetrator.

This thesis examines the cultural, rhetorical and political implications of a reality television show that presents authentic versions of lethal female violence as opposed to the versions of lethal female violence that could only exist in the sexual fantasies of male writers. The version of lethal female violence that *Snapped* showcases is extremely rare on television and offers a scarce glimpse into the lives and motives of female killers. Specifically, the focus is on the characterization of each episode as the story of a woman “snapping.” As stated earlier, this is found to be a misnomer that the show

readily promotes. The construction of such a paradoxical storyline functions rhetorically in admitting to women's ability to be violent but reframing this violence within a reality in which women can only be violent when they lack selfhood and act out of psychosis. Why the show's producers would continue to choose stories that contradict the premise of the show is unclear as well as their awareness of the show's paradoxical nature. There is little evidence to determine what the intentions of the show's producer are and this is not the focus of this thesis. Instead, the message the show creates – whether inadvertently or not – will be focused on.

This analysis is guided by the following research questions: what is "snapping" and how is it rhetorically constructed? How does this characterization of lethal female violence change its meaning and impact as opposed to male violence which is not characterized in this manner? Is there a cathartic experience in seeing a woman enact a crime that is usually within the domains of masculinity? Is this experience hegemonic or counter hegemonic? How does this show change or reaffirm views of lethal female violence? How does this show reestablish and/or change ideas about women being inherently evil and emotionally unstable? Does the reality that the show creates pose a danger to women, especially those in jail for self defense?

RATIONALE

As illustrated before, this show highlights a very rare form of violence that exists in our society. This alone is reason enough to investigate the show, especially since – as far as this essayist is aware – there has been no academic analysis of *Snapped*, but there is an even more vital reason for the show to be analyzed and that is the danger the show

poses to women. Statistically when women are violent it is within the context of self defense or the defense of a child, but *Snapped* showcases the most heinous versions of violence in which women kill out of greed, passion or jealousy, and this is depicted as the norm for lethal female violence (Jenson, 2001; Silverman, Vega & Danner, 1993). In each episode, *Snapped* profiles one woman who has murdered a husband for money, a lover in a jealous rage, or sometimes even a parent who was in the way – one of the most heinous examples of lethal female violence. It should be clarified that episodes portraying abuse have been aired. Of the 115 episodes that have been aired as of April 2010 only sixteen episodes involved abuse. The episodes featuring Kimberly Kondejewski (Season 3, Episode 6), Laura Rodgers (Season 3, Episode 8) and Erin Dukes (Season 4, Episode 3) were the only three cases in which there was clear abuse and it was portrayed by the show as such. Each episode ended by vindicating the woman through acquittal, but beyond these three episodes that outcome is rare. In the episode of Donna Fryman (Season 4, Episode 4) who hired two teens to kill her abusive police officer husband, her abuse is portrayed as less clear cut, especially during the trial. Throughout the show evidence was brought up that could contradict Donna's claims but she was found not guilty of murder and instead found guilty of conspiracy. In the case of Kimberly Cunningham (Season 5, Episode 4) she was not abused, but her daughter was raped by a relative. After Kimberly found out, she shot the relative in front of his office. She wasn't found guilty of murder but was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter. Some other examples of episodes that are within the context of abuse are Deidra Lane (Season 3, Episode 13) and Kelly Forbes (Season 7, Episode 17). In both cases the women state they killed in self defense but *Snapped* focuses on evidence that comes out

in the investigation and trial that proves otherwise, such as how long the women waited before calling the cops, the lack of bruising each of them had as well as other forensic evidence that undermined their assertions of self defense. A majority of the episodes that portray abuse are similar to the two episodes listed earlier: the abuse claims are just a trick women use to get off the hook for murder. The episode of Kimberly Anderson (Season 3, Episode 11) is one such example. She was portrayed as a woman who “sounded like she was on the verge”; even her estranged husband, Brent, said he was scared of her. He was described as the traditional “country lawyer” that would defend people even if they couldn’t pay. When he expressed his fears to his divorce attorney she told him, “she’s a girl, what can she do?” A few weeks later, she shot him eight times. Kimberly argued that it was in self defense after she accused him of molesting their youngest son. She stated he attacked her in rage and that she grabbed her gun. The forensic evidence, which *Snapped* heavily focused on, shows that she shot him while he was down and found bullets in his hands, showing that he was trying to protect himself. The number of bullets was also characterized as suspicious. The show portrayed her as a demanding, vicious and selfish woman that would constantly fault him for letting people not pay for his services. During the trial prosecutors argued that the shooting was premeditated, pointing out that Kim had never claimed spousal abuse during the divorce proceedings, but the jury acquitted Kim of all charges in the killing. Brent's family sued her in civil court and the civil jury didn't believe she was in imminent danger at the time of the shooting. They ordered her to pay \$540,000 to her husband's family. Although she was found innocent, *Snapped* clearly finds her guilty. All the forensic evidence and testimony within the episode leaves *Snapped*'s audience with no other choice but to see

her actions as murder. A similar case to Kimberly's is that of Adrienne Hickson (Episode 6, Season 3) a young African American law student who stabbed her boyfriend to death. Adrienne was also described as having "a silver spoon" in her mouth, being a "princess" and "very spoiled." At her birthday party the couple got into an argument in her boyfriend's apartment and Adrienne stabbed him. Once again the show focused on the forensic evidence that undermined her claims of self defense. Blood splatter and stab marks in the couch made the abuse narrative Adrienne told difficult to believe. She pled guilty to murder only after the jury couldn't agree upon a verdict. She agreed to five years in prison and fifteen years probation, which by most standards is a relatively small sentence.

Snapped has a knack for undermining the legitimacy of abuse defenses. It tends to depict women as getting off easy or getting off completely when they use domestic violence as a defense. In total the episodes of abuse – in which the show portrays the abuse as the legitimate catalyst of the man's murder – only make up 0.03% of the shows, depicting abuse as rare and women using abuse to their advantage as common. Episodes like those of Deidra Lane, Kelly Forbes and others also help to undercut the legitimacy of Battered Women's Syndrome which is an already difficult defense (Ogle & Jacob, 2002). That is clear in the case of Sharon Daniels (Season 6, Episode 13) who claimed her preacher husband had long been abusing her and she shot him when he attacked her. In the episode the narrator states, "The DA played jurors the 911 call Sharon made minutes later while her husband was still alive bleeding to death in the bathroom. Sharon: I shot him three times. I can't take it anymore" In the phone call Sharon is extremely calm and almost unemotional. The jury finds her guilty regardless of the

evidence of abuse but they cannot decide on a sentence. The judge gave her a ten year sentence with the possibility of probation in five years. At the end of the episode one of the lawyer's states, "Her testimony is what got her such a light sentence. It truly is, nothing else. Her testimony, who she is [sic] and how she came across."

Monique Johnson (Season 7, Episode 6) also admitted to shooting her significant other; and she also claimed it had been motivated out of self defense. She stated that they had started arguing and he attacked her, backing her into a closet. She'd grabbed a gun kept there and shot him. Prosecutors argued that it wasn't self-defense since most of the shots hit him in the back. Regardless, the jury could not convict her of first-degree murder and instead found her guilty of reckless homicide. After sentencing, with credit for time served awaiting trial, she walked away with only probation. The show clearly depicts the outrage of this verdict, showing the family's pain at Monique's ability to walk free. *Snapped* not only inaccurately portrays why women kill, but also the consequences of their actions. *Snapped* focuses on cases when women have a difficult time proving that there was imminent danger and that their abuse was severe. Women are shown as conniving and ruthless, killing for greed or revenge and then using their gender to get away with it.

Although there are a few episodes that do feature women in abusive relationships, they are extremely rare and in *Snapped*'s most recent season – season eight – not one abuse story was aired. The abuse stories also didn't start airing until the third season, which shows that *Snapped* didn't intend on dealing with stories of abuse originally. Instead, stories of heinous and depraved violence like Rhonda Orr, who killed her partly disabled husband by setting their house on fire, or Sheila Davaloo, an Iranian immigrant

who blindfolded and handcuffed her husband to play a “kinky” game and ended up stabbing him, are what *Snapped*'s audience has grown accustomed to seeing. Women acting out in violence to take charge of their life, or even women "snapping" and realizing that they no longer want to be subjected to the demeaning roles that patriarchy has relegated them to, are not shown.

As I will argue, "snapping" can only occur in a moment of insanity when a women's stereotypical inherently evil nature or inherent irrationality is finally revealed. *Snapped* creates a reality in which any woman has the capability of acting out in violence in an unpredictable manner for no logical reason, and this reality is a dangerous one. The fact that the show portrays selfish and irrational versions of lethal female violence as reflective of reality when they are a complete contrast to statistical information, hurts women in general and those behind bars specifically. Many women currently in prison are there for unjustifiable reasons: “At least half of all women in prison, including those jailed for nonviolent offences, were abused by spouses before their incarceration” (Talvi, 2005 para 9). Angela Browne, a domestic violence researcher, found that “women who kill men in self-defense -- and where there is evidence of severe assault prior to the killing -- are acquitted only 25 percent of the time” (“The Glendale Commission” 2006 para. 1). National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that “the average prison sentence of men who kill their female partners ranges from two to six years, while women who kill their partners are sentenced to an average of 15 years” (Leonard, 2002 p.75). The movement to help women who are in jail for defending themselves is hurt by creating a framework in which women can only enact violence out of greed, hatred or lust. “Of all female murder victims, the proportion

killed by an intimate has been increasing. Of male murder victims, the proportion killed by an intimate has dropped,” though it would be hard to believe this by watching *Snapped* (“Homicide Trends in the U.S.”, 2010).

In creating such an inaccurate picture, the show undercuts the true reality of women in which every day three will die at the hands of an intimate (Rennison, 2003). “Lovers and husbands were responsible for almost 60 percent of the deaths of women between 20 and 50” (Berstein, 2004 para. 2). While discounting the frightening and very serious situation women face, the show also perpetuates age old stereotypes of women even though the show has been credited with “rewriting the rulebook for women’s television [and]...having had an instrumental role in recasting women’s television away from its celebrations of victimhood...” (Bellafonte, 2007). In *Snapped* no victims are celebrated; rather, they are “symbolically annihilated” – by ignoring the fact that most women murder in self defense (O’Shea, 1999; Jensen, 2001) – which leaves them without a voice on a network that is supposed to be “for women, by women.” *Snapped* wants its audience to disregard these facts and instead buy into the salacious and horrendous stories of female killers all the while ignoring the truly horrid stories of women who are locked away when they are true victims.

METHOD

For this thesis, an initial textual analysis was conducted of *Snapped* episodes that were aired during February 22 to March 14, 2010. The Oxygen network normally runs marathons of the show on Sundays sometimes running as long as eight hours. The marathons also showcase episodes from various seasons and usually end – though

sometimes episodes are shown afterwards as well – with the most recent episode. The network also airs other episodes periodically throughout the week. This proved very beneficial since the network does not put out seasons of the show and copies of older episodes were not available elsewhere. From the recordings obtained, I was able to view a variety of episodes from various seasons. Overall viewing resulted in approximately 30 hours of programming.

Initially, I viewed notes taken on episodes, recordings and plot summaries of other episodes that had been watched much earlier for personal viewing in order to conduct quantitative research on race, age, class and sexuality. Later the commercials of recorded episodes were used in order to analyze the intended audience since demographic information was not available. Although both the theme of the network and show made it clear what gender was being targeted, issues of race, age and class were not as clear.

After identifying core themes, including the structure of the show, issues of narrative and visual construction, I chose five episodes that I found to be most reflective of an average episode. These episodes will be used specifically for rhetorical analysis. The episodes were chosen based on what was available from recordings, which limited my choices. These episodes were representative of the show specifically in narrative form. There were five characteristics that were looked for in choosing an episode: (1) there are characteristics of the "snapped" woman that the audience can easily identify with (2) the woman showed no signs of deviant behavior before the murder (3) the woman killed for selfish reasons (4) the woman was cognizant of the crime and the murder was premeditated and (5) the woman was found guilty.

The first characteristic can be seen in almost every episode since it is the intention of the producers to use women that the audience can a part of themselves in. The second characteristic is also extremely prevalent in episodes since the complication of the “bad girl/good girl” dichotomy adds to the appeal of the show, making the episodes that much more shocking when a subservient housewife enacts cold blooded murder. The last three characteristics are very common but not all episodes have them. Some women are found innocent or their cases were overturned on appeal or at a retrial. A few women are found to have mental disorders like bipolar disorder – though that doesn’t mean they “snapped,” it just complicates the issue – and a handful of women, in earlier seasons, kill their abusive husbands. These characteristics were extremely uncommon to see in the show, and although they exist, they do not reflect the overall reality *Snapped* creates in relation to lethal female violence which is why they were not looked at when choosing episodes.

The analysis that is illustrated throughout this thesis is based upon the conclusions that I have reached after watching, and taking notes on, numerous episodes of *Snapped*. This analysis is combined with relevant theorists and research in order to arrive at a well researched and intelligent discussion of the show. There is no academic analysis of the show, and other than the article mentioned earlier, no other analysis has been written about *Snapped*. Because of this deficit in research, the analysis about specific episodes is mine alone, but the analysis of general themes that are apparent in each episode are coupled with research that relate to those general themes.

EPISODES

1. Lynn Turner (Season 6, Episode 6) - She worked as a 911 operator and ended up meeting and marrying a police officer. She asked him to change his life insurance policy, so that she would be the beneficiary. The couple started having money trouble and her husband began working another job to pay the bills while Lynn “partied with friends.” Her husband ended up dying of the flu and she moved in with the man she was having an affair with four days later. They had a child and almost ten years later he died of the same cause. After investigation it was found she had poisoned both men with anti-freeze. This episode was picked because of how famous this case became. She is still known as “Georgia’s Black Widow.” The case received regional and national attention, and a book written about the case.
2. Sheila Davallo (Season 4 Episode 6) – She is an Iranian-American woman who met her second husband while she was still married to her first husband. She would tell her first husband that she had a brother who had schizophrenia and did not know that she lived with anyone and then when her husband left she would ask Paul Christos, the man she was having an affair with, to come over. When her husband found out he divorced her and she later married Christos. While playing a sex game, Davallo stabs him twice and then after a few hours takes him to a secluded parking lot by a hospital and stabs him again. This episode has been picked because of the sexuality tied to the crime as well as the way she fooled both of the men in her lives. The way in which the crime was acted out is also pertinent to looking at how lethal female violence is seen by society.

3. Adrienne Hickson (Season 6, Episode 3) – She is an ambitious, 24-year-old law student who met her boyfriend, Shawn Washington, in college. She was looking forward to a career in criminal law, and to spending her life with her college sweetheart. After college, she was accepted to Howard law School, but Shawn stayed back in Atlanta working two jobs to pay for Adrienne's plane tickets to come back home. They happily stayed together despite the 600 miles separating them, but when Adrienne went to Atlanta to visit Shawn they fought constantly. Adrienne was upset that Shawn went to help his friend move, arguing that they only had some much time to spend together. When Shawn came back home the couple got into a loud argument in the parking lot of Shawn's apartment. Adrienne stormed off and Shawn followed her. Ten minutes later, Shawn stumbled back out, covered in blood and clutching his shoulder. While his friends rushed him to the hospital, Adrienne got in her car and went home to her family in South Carolina. She came back on Christmas night to visit Shawn in the hospital but discovered he was dead. Adrienne was charged with murder soon after. Her defense attorney claimed she was a battered woman; the prosecutor said that Adrienne was the one with a history of violence. The jury was deadlocked and the prosecutor offered her a plea that many in the media criticized as too lenient. This episode will prove beneficial for showing how *Snapped* undermines self-defense claim, and also how the show creates a clear binary between the "snapped" woman and victim.
4. Brenda Andrew (Season 2 Episode 12) – Brenda Andrew was a stay-at-home mom and Sunday school teacher. She had married her high school sweetheart, Rob, but at the age of 40, Brenda was having a midlife crisis. She and Rob separated. In

November of 2001, Rob stopped by to pick up the kids and both he and Brenda were shot in an attempted burglary. Rob was pronounced dead. Police investigating the crime quickly discovered that Brenda had been having an affair with a fellow church member and insurance salesman named James Pavatt. James had recently sold Rob a million-dollar life insurance policy. James and Brenda were arrested at the Mexican border. She was convicted and sentenced to death. She is the only woman on Oklahoma's death row. This episode was chosen because Brenda clearly represented a controlled and ideal woman until she had her mid-life crisis. Also the punishment for this crime will be useful in arguing that the show creates a cathartic experience that works to warn women about the dangers of acting out in violence.

5. Carolyn Warmus (Season 2 Episode 4) – She grew up very privileged and is described by the show as spoiled. After getting a job as an elementary school teacher, she meets Paul Soloman. Paul was married but Carolyn had an affair with him, which the show characterizes as Paul being under Carolyn's spell. Carolyn wanted him to leave his wife but he refused. Later she hired a private detective to follow Soloman, and then she convinced him to murder Soloman's wife. To get Paul out of the house she convinced him to meet her and they had sex in her car as his wife was being murdered. This episode was also chosen for the sexuality attached to the murder and the way Carolyn was characterized. Also the press surrounding this case was also quite extensive. Two television movies - *The Danger of Love: The Carolyn Warmus Story* and *A Murderous Affair: The Carolyn Warmus Story* – were made about her crimes and her case was profiled on the Investigation Discovery program *Deadly Women*. The episode was entitled *Femme Fatale*.

METHODOLOGY

The approach to this paper is to combine theories from multiple disciplines relevant to the show. This thesis will be very heavily relying on Kenneth Burke's Dramatism but will only be focusing on a few of his theories that are particularly relevant for this topic. Pentadic analysis will be utilized to rhetorically illustrate what "snapping" means and how it is constructed in the show. The ratios of purpose/act and purpose/agent will be used to show how these women are characterized without selfhood or agency. Burke's theory of the motion/action distinction will also be employed to further highlight how the show tries to characterize the female murderers' actions without purpose, which is not how most television violence depicting males is characterized. To buttress these two Burkean theories Nancy Tuana's *The Less Noble Sex* (1993) will be used in which she outlines five recurring arguments that stem from the idea that woman is an imperfect or "misbegotten man." These different ideas of female inferiority all play on the same theme of women being a danger to society if not controlled. These same archaic ideas are being reinvented by *Snapped* since, in its universe, lethal female violence can only exist when it is unpredictable, illogical and vengeful. Two other Burkean theories that are beneficial for this analysis are his ideas on identification and catharsis. Understanding the connection created between the audience and the female murderer is important to recognize because of its unique ability to make the audience feel pity for the "snapped" woman, and, therefore, set the groundwork for a cathartic experience. The identification formed also creates catharsis for the audience because they are filled with both pity and fear: pity in the fact that they understand her stresses and hardships and fear that she is a monstrous murder who is in

some way consubstantial with them. The trial phase of the show works to release the earlier tensions that have been built up and reasserts patriarchal authority by punishing these women and reestablishing justice. The female audience sees that these women's actions led to their ultimate demise and understands that acting out in violence will not help them.

Two other scholars that will be applicable are Mary Daly and Bram Dijkstra and their ideas on what Daly terms "Myth of Feminine Evil". Another large component of this thesis is to argue that such depictions of lethal female violence, especially ones that are so contrary to reality, work to reconfirm the Myth of Feminine Evil. I will be tracing Daly's conception of the idea as well as the history that she points to that has helped to create and sustain the myth. Dijkstra's work will be used to further discuss the myth since he illustrates it through popular culture. The last group of scholars used will be focusing on violence. James Gilligan will be used to discuss the motives behind violence and why lethal female violence is so rare and what it means in a patriarchal society, and Vickie Jensen, Belinda Morrissey and Ann Jones will be used to discuss why and how lethal female violence exists.

KENNETH BURKE AND FEMINISM

The two major disciplines that are being drawn from are rhetoric and feminism. The feminist analysis for this thesis is comprised of multiple scholars as stated earlier in the methodology, but the rhetorical analysis is solely comprised from one scholar: Kenneth Burke. Before using these two different disciplines side by side, it is important to explain why they are being used together. Kenneth Burke never identified as a

feminist and never discussed feminism in his work which might seem problematic, but his major focus was on illuminating hierarchies, seeing them as an inherent part of our language and communication which makes his theories compatible with feminism.

Although he doesn't use feminist theories in an article that will be used later, "Form and Persecution in the 'Oresteia'" (1952), part of his analysis arrives at a somewhat feminist conclusion, further demonstrating the feminist uses for his work. This is evident in the fact that many scholars have used Burke's work with a feminist focus. For instance, in *Burke in the 21st Century* (1993) there are two articles, "'Being' and the Promise of Trinity: A Feminist Addition to Burke's Theory of Dramatism" by Karen Foss and Cindy White and "'Can this Marriage be Saved?': Reclaiming Burke for Feminist Scholarship" by Phyllis M. Japp, which use Burke's theories for feminism aims. In *The Other "F" Word: The Feminist in the Classroom* (1990) Bauer states she used "Kenneth Burke's formulation of education as persuasion" in order to construct her argument (p.389). This is one of many examples where scholars have found Burke's work beneficial for a feminist argument. I have also found his work useful since his theories allow me to elucidate how the rhetorical construction of the show not only plays upon archaic ideas of women as dangerous to society but also ignores the reality of lethal female violence. This poses a grave danger to women.

CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Although there have been articles in the *New York Times* and other news sources that have commented on either the appeal or effect of *Snapped*, as of yet – as far as this essayist is aware – there has been no academic work on this show looking at the cultural and political significance of showcasing female murders. My approach to this thesis, since there is a deficit in research specific to the show, is to combine theories from multiple disciplines relevant to the show in order to demonstrate the archetypal and archaic myths that appear in many of the episodes. This thesis is not only an interdisciplinary analysis of the show, but also has a dual purpose in that it chooses to illuminate the show through both the frames of feminism and rhetoric. The specific use of Kenneth Burke's dramatism as well as other theories on catharsis and the rhetorical functions of popular culture are employed as further evidence that rhetorical theories are not only beneficial – as well as extremely influential – in the field of communication, but also for feminist analysis as well.

As was stated in the methodology, I will be relying on many theories from Kenneth Burke including the pentad, identification and consubstantiality, and catharsis. Kenneth Burke was a prolific scholar and for the purpose of this project it would be out of the scope of this literary review – as well as virtually impossible – to cover everything he has written. Instead, only the theories that were listed earlier will be focused on. This will not prove problematic since there has been much scholarship produced that has

reinterpreted and expanding these theories. The following section will focus on the scholars that are most relevant to how these theories will be applied in this thesis. Those scholars using theories as applied to visual rhetoric and popular culture, which is something Kenneth Burke did not focus on during his long and prolific career, will be particularly relevant.

RHETORIC AND POPULAR CULTURE

Rhetoric, when formulated by the Greeks, largely focused on public speaking and the art of persuasion. Modern rhetoric focuses on many aspects of human discourse and has most recently turned its attention to popular culture. What was once seen as the “lower arts” of the middle and lower classes is now recognized as a very important part of culture and everyday life. Popular culture is now seen as having rhetorical dimensions and working as a persuasive force in the lives of individuals. Although popular culture may be seen as having no persuasive intentions, it is still a very effective form of persuasion, and this has been recognized by many scholars, most notably Barry Brummett who has written two books devoted to this topic, *Rhetoric in Popular Culture* (2006) and *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture* (1991). In *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture*, Brummett finds Rhetoric’s history to pose a problem for its future use in analyzing popular culture because the focus of rhetoric as a study (rhetorica docens) has been devoted mainly to speeches, essays and other forms of human discourse. Brummett (1991) states, “[m]ost of rhetorical studies examine interventionist manifestations in response to exigencies”, only looking at how rhetoric manifests from particular situations that call for its necessity (p.51). This is problematic because it limits

the scope of analysis for rhetoricians and only narrowly focuses on certain aspects of popular culture as a text. In many cases the exigency of many artifacts is not the most relevant aspect to analyze from a rhetorical standpoint. By restricting popular culture to be seen as only “discrete, interventionist texts” one cannot fully understand the scope or impact of the artifact (Brummett, 1991 p. 50). In order to address this issue Brummett suggests that scholars redefine the meaning of rhetoric so that it can better encompass the many dimensions of human discourse that move beyond rhetoric as just as an act and instead see it as a process (Winkelmann & Shearer-Creman, 2004). Brummett's definition deals with the more complex manifestations of rhetoric by seeing it as the function of managing meaning within social arrangements (Brummett, 1991 p.53).

Brummett’s other suggestion to solve the problematic history of rhetoric is to see it as having three functions: exigent, quotidian and implicative. The first function is what he refers to when he speaks of rhetoric as interventionist in which the exigency explains the rhetorical act. Brummett does not suggest that we should ignore this function but that too much emphasis has been put on it and that a great deal more attention needs to be placed on the other two functions of rhetoric. The quotidian function deals with managing “the public and personal meanings that affect every day, even minute to minute decisions” (p.41).

This rhetorical function deals with what Brummett terms “appropriational manifestations” or, in other words, how society manages its common sense through appropriating different fragments of information together to form a cohesive picture that allows them to make sense of the world they live in. Traditionally, events are seen as discrete texts in which there are clear boundaries of time and space. When using the

quotidian function it is important to not view all texts as discrete. Some texts can be diffuse in which there are not clear boundaries of time and space. An event like watching a television show with friends can have be a diffuse text because this experience can have multiple signs and artifacts involved, such as talking with friends about the show as well as other related topics, seeing the commercials aired during the show, people coming and going to get food or go to the bathroom (Brummett, 2006). This is the level at which diffuse texts come into play because audience members will not understand that they are assigning meaning to actions. Many of these common sense managers are not thought of something as rhetorical because socially held beliefs have “no sense of a text at all,” or in other words society does not see meaning in its beliefs that help individuals navigate their world, and instead understands them as concepts that need no questioning (Brummett,1991 p.42).

To better explain this function of rhetoric Brummett adopts Sam Becker’s model of the mosaic in which bits of information are pieced together as a whole. Meaning at this rhetorical function then becomes “the logic of combinations that orders bits together, and therefore, a bit has meaning only insofar as it may be combined with other bits into patterns” (p.75). The last function is implicative and works under “conditional” manifestations. This level is mostly comprised of “basic values, grammatical categories, fundamental assumptions and rules of thought and language” (Brummett, 1991 p.42). It is “rarely thought of at all, and when it is, it seems like a ghost haunting the houses of ‘real’ texts, faintly seen assumptions and conditions hovering just beyond the clear and concrete signs and utterances of speeches and everyday life” (p.45). Brummett states that this would be a rhetoric that would work below the surface of consciousness, even more

so than the quotidian function of rhetoric.

Brummett's work has been very influential on the study of rhetoric and his books are rare pieces of literature that directly deal with how rhetoric can become a useful tool for analyzing popular culture. *The Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture's* influence is evident in how many other scholars have applied Brummett's theories in their work. Two examples are Cathy A. Colton's chapter "Shattered Dreams: A material rhetorical reading of Charlotte Fedder's memoir of domestic abuse" in *Survivor Rhetoric: Negotiations and narrativity in abused women's language* (2004) and Raymond D.S. Anderson's chapter "Evolving Rivers of Joy: Postmodernity and American Christian Culture" in *More than Precious Memories: The rhetoric of southern gospel music* (2005). Colton deals with the "values that ground and make possible domestic abuse" (p.126); for this study she addresses – among other things – religious stories prevalent in our culture.

She looks at how these stories function rhetorically, not at an exigent level but at the implicative level in order to see effects they have on abused women. She gives the example of the story of Adam and Eve and argues that it works at the implicative level because the idea of this myth seeps into other areas of our culture, which, she states, is evident in literature and legislation. The idea of women being inferior and a danger to men directs how we interact and function. Colton states that for women who are abused this myth then becomes self-affirming and that the rhetoric of violence can literally be "beaten into someone" (p.126).

Her argument is that violence can work as a persuasive force in the case of domestic abuse. In many cases violence, or the threat of violence, is seen as a fear appeal that will not ultimately change the desire of the person being coerced but most likely will

change their action. In the case of domestic abuse constant violence can literally reform women's symbolic structure making them, at an implicative level, buy into the idea that this abuse is deserved. Colton also looks at Charlotte Fedder, and abused women, and makes note of a prayer Charlotte writes about in her diary in which she thanks God for her husband and makes sure that his life is blessed and also asks that she is constantly made to be a good wife. Colton finds this passage very illuminating for how it illustrates the Church's rhetorical function. She states, "[t]he prayers and what the church taught Charlottewas [that she was] to see him as a blessing and work to please him, no matter what. The symbolic structure offered by the Catholic Church in her prayers is imaginatively limited to a world in which husbands do behave in 'holy' ways and find their wives always 'lovable'" (p.130).

All of this is extremely pertinent to this thesis because this essayist will be arguing that the myths of both Pandora and Eve are displayed in the show. The rhetorical function of the myth of Eve, as illustrated in Colton's argument, is of particular importance because it is one of the strongest foundations for the "myth of feminine evil". Its ability to work on an implicative level will be beneficial to the study since it better elucidates why this myth brings in so many viewers to *Snapped* and is constantly repeated in popular culture and elsewhere.

Anderson (2005) was also able to utilize Brummett's theories but applied them to gospel music, proving the vast range of Brummett's theory. Anderson took a much different approach from Colton by focusing on the quotidian function of rhetoric and combining these ideas with postmodernity theory. This particular approach will not be as

relevant for this study but does show that Brummett's theory can be applicable for many different types of media and in conjunction with other theories outside of rhetoric.

KENNETH BURKE AND REALITY TELEVISION

For this thesis, I will be heavily relying on Kenneth Burke's dramatism. This may prove problematic since Burke has what Cathcart refers to as a "literary/print bias" (1993 p.300)². Burke was originally a literature critic. After the devastating effects of the late 20's and early 30's Burke turned to social criticism but even during this time his methodology was framed around print and focused very little on technology. This thesis will not be the first to use Kenneth Burke's theories for non-print artifacts; in fact, many scholars have found Burke's theories extremely useful for looking at media, but it is necessary to look at how and why Burke's theories have transitioned into being used for the analysis of modern forms of technology. Although Burke did have a literary bias that doesn't negate his work's applicability for popular culture. As Cathcart (1993) states, "Burke's fear of technology...does not negate Burke's philosophy of language and symbolic action (rhetoric) or make it inapplicable as a conceptual bias for analyzing or evaluating our more modern media of communication – cinema, radio, television, and computer" (p.291). Although Burke did not analyze modern media, he did - according to Cathcart - take a position on it "similar to those who maintain that technology is just another form of tool making humans have developed and that it does not determine

² In the Cathcart article, Burke is referring to communication technology, but this is still relevant for this thesis in understanding how Burke's theories connect to other more modern issues that he did not write about.

human thought and action. Rather human needs, desires and interests determine how tools (technology) are to be used” (p.297).

A cornerstone of Burke’s theories is his division between human behavior as motion and action. Foss et al. (2002) define “motion” as the biological aspects of human beings and state that it “is concerned with bodily processes” (p.182). Motion is behavior that humans lack control over. For instance, a cough is a sudden reflex within an individual’s throat which helps to clear his or her breathing passages. This is a behavior that happens without the control or prior knowledge of the individual. Action, on the other hand, is imbued with meaning. Where motion lacks control, action demands it. Action involves the more complex and “neurological aspect of the human being . . . [and] is concerned more with mental processes” (182). Burke believes humans constantly act on a motion/action distinction, in which motion can become action, but action cannot be broken down into motion. Cathcart (1993) finds this idea also applicable to media. He argues that “[f]or Burke, images – pictures, photos – exist only in the realm of motion. When humans interpret these and give them symbolic meaning, they then exert influence as action³. In other words, humans respond to all stimuli in the same way, creating a language (i.e., a print language) of symbolic action. It is not the viewer (interpreter) alone, however, who endows visual images...with the quality of action. It is the technological structure and form that engage the viewer in a dialectic which produces a narrative whereupon action arises” (p.298). Watching television may be seen as a

³ Recently Debra Hawhee published *Moving Bodies: Kenneth Burke at the Edge of Language* in which she argues that Burke is referring to bodily functions rather than true symbolic action and that the interpretation that moves away from the body is incorrect.

behavior that is classified as motion because the audience does not control the messages it receives, but this behavior can be changed into action because the audience has the ability to interpret the television and, therefore, give it meaning.

The motion/action distinction is not the only theory useful for looking at media: form is also another important idea that is applicable for media criticism. For Burke, form did not have the traditional literary meaning most might think it had. In *Counter-Statement* (1968/1931), Burke defines it as “the creation of an appetite in the mind of an audience and the satisfying of that appetite” (p.31). Burke felt that it was “form rather than verbal content that produces action rather than motion” (Cathcart, 1993 p.303). Form is particularly important when looking at popular culture because popular culture artifacts so heavily rely on form. It is very rare to see a movie or a television show that ends in a shocking manner in which the guy does not get the girl or the hero does not prevail. When viewing popular culture, audiences expect form, whether they know it or not.

Another theory relevant to the show is the theory of the pentad. In *A Grammar of Motives* (1945) Burke asks, “What is involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?” (p.xv). This question refers back to Burke’s distinction between human action and motion. Action is inherent to being human and Burke uses the pentad to discover the underlying motives involved in action. The largest difference between motion and action is choice. Burke devised the pentad to illuminate the motives behind individuals’ choices in order to understand the type of motivation behind a particular action or discourse. Burke created five terms – agent, agency, act, scene and purpose – in order to understand the motives behind the actions of individuals and how these actions

are characterized. These terms help to illuminate motive in the sense that they make clear the motivation behind a symbolic act and these terms also help to give understanding to how an act is being framed. If someone is late to work because of the rain, this would be framed as scene/act, meaning that the rain caused the act of being late. This situation could also be seen from the point of view of someone not leaving early enough to circumvent the effect rain may have on how long it takes to get to work. In that case the situation would be framed as an agent/act relation, therefore understanding the late arrival (or act) as caused by the agent not the scene. These terms are then paired off in the question of how does _____ influence _____? (Blakesley, 2001). “Burke’s pentad functions grammatically as a means of articulating the relationships among ideas, how words about motives fit together to explain human action. As a philosophical grammar, it is capable of generating an infinite variety of equations or meaningful relationships, just as the grammar of a language enables us to generate an infinite variety of sentences” (Blakesley, 2001 p.8). Although these terms may seem simple their meaning can change based on the context they are in and the point of view from which they are being viewed. As Burke states

Our term, “Agent,” for instance, is a general heading that might, in a given case, require further subdivision, as an agent might have his act modified (hence partly motivated) by friends (co-agents) or enemies (counter-agents). Again, under “Agent” one could place any personal properties that are assigned a motivational value, such as “ideas,” “the will,” “fear,” “malice,” “intuition,” “the creative imagination.” A portrait painter may treat the body as property of the agent (an expression of personality), whereas materialistic medicine would treat it as

“scenic,” a purely “objective material”; and from another point of view it would be classed as an agency, a means by which one gets reports of the world at large (as cited in Blakesley, 2001 p.28).

For the scope of this thesis two ratios will be useful – purpose/act and purpose/agent– in order to illustrate two things: first, most crime is characterized in one of these pentads. The focus is on the motive behind the murder which characterizes it as a purposeful act. The murder is only understood through the framework of it being carried out for a particular reason. The other ratio moves the focus from the act of murder to the agent, or murderer. Purpose is still part of the equation, but now the question becomes why did he (or in this case she) do it? What drove the murderer to enact such a crime? Though the murderer is seen as disturbing societal order he or she is still seen as having been cognizant of the act he or she was committing. Ultimately, whether the focus is on the act or agent both are offered purpose.

The second issue that is demonstrated in the use of these ratios is that the act of "snapping" cannot be placed in either a purpose/act or purpose/agent ratio. Instead, "snapping" is characterized in a scene/act ratio in which the woman's body determines the act of murder. It is her physical makeup, hormones and sexual organs that forced the act of violence upon her. This ratio is deterministic and is considered motion because of the lack of choice that is inherent to the act. The act of "snapping" shows women as lacking purpose which plays on long held stereotypes of women as hysterical and not in control of their emotions (Tuana, 1993). Both the purpose/agent and purpose/act ratios demonstrate cognition. Although the purpose/act ratio does not specifically deal with the individual, it is evident that the agent enacting the act has an awareness and is in control

of his or her emotions. As Rueckert states “[a]ccording to the logic of the act purpose ratio, the kind of act . . . as well as the selection and arrangement of detail within the act are largely controlled by the author’s conscious purpose” (Rueckert, 1963 p.76-7). When individuals are characterized in this ratio or the purpose/agent ratio, they are given full selfhood since their actions are grounded in a focus on their desires.

In *The Elements of Dramatism*, Blakesley discusses the meaning of the purpose/agency ratio. As far as this essayist is aware, this is the only scholarly text that devotes a full section on this specific pentadic ratio. When the ratios are discussed, they are rarely focused on individually and instead pushed together as a whole that can work as tools for rhetoricians. When Blakesley discusses the ratio he calls it “agent/purpose ratio”, but he states that “all the ratios can be reversed also” (p.34). He goes on to assert that the “agent-purpose ratio . . . show[s] us how the agent is motivated by the purpose to act” (p.152). Blakesley offers an example of this ratio from popular culture through the film *Hannibal*. He argues that most of the characters in the movie were horrified by Hannibal’s crimes because they seemed to lack a purpose. Though they may view Hannibal's crimes as motiveless, Blakesley sees a very obvious purpose: the need to identify and be consubstantial (both of these theories will be discussed in more depth later one). Hannibal took Burke’s idea of consubstantiality to a whole other level by resolving the constant need to be a part of someone/something while at the same time wanting to maintain independence by literally taking their physical substance and ingesting it. “In *Hannibal*, Harris offers us a glimpse of the complex motives of an imaginary serial killer in such a way that we might come to understand that these are never motiveless crimes [*Hannibal*] can be seen specifically as an expression for the

desire for identification and consubstantiality, both of which hinge on the agent-purpose ratio” (p.153).

The fact that "snapping" cannot be characterized in either of the ratios and, therefore, cannot be seen as action plays upon archaic notions of female instability and moral defect. In *The Less Noble Sex*, Tuana analyzes the sexually biased ideas of women’s inferiority that were promoted as truths in philosophy, medicine and religion. Her work traces these ideas from classical Greece to the 19th century in a thematic approach that looks at five recurring arguments that stem from the idea that woman is an imperfect or "misbegotten man." Although these sexist beliefs may have largely been abandoned by science, they are perpetuated in present day popular culture as is evident in *Snapped*.

One of the reoccurring arguments clearly present in the show is the idea of woman as hysterical. Women’s sexual organs were long thought to have crippled a woman’s control of her emotions. Their ability to reproduce was directly tied to their inability to maintain rationality. Tuana asserts “[w]omen’s reproductive cycles...were all times when she was subject to the nervous disorder labeled ‘reflexive insanity’, the nineteenth-century term for hysteria. Woman was a ‘victim of periodicity’ and thereby subject to a range of mental disturbances that had ‘neither homologue or analogue in man’” (p.101). As Tuana (1993) asserts, “[a]lthough until the nineteenth century emphasis was upon the physical ailments to which women were prone because of their sexual organs, a connection between the uterus and madness had been established almost two millennia earlier” (p.95). In the reality of *Snapped*, all men are in danger since women’s inherent instability poses a threat. Their emotions overcome them, and they

"snapped". But women are not only burdened with sexual organs that make them hysterical, they also lack an innate sense of right and wrong: "[n]ormal femininity is defined as underdeveloped in comparison to masculinity. Woman is seen as more tied to the instinctual, the emotional, and the sexual. She is less capable of controlling her desires, and so must be controlled by man for her own good and for the good of society" (Tuana, 1993 p.92).

Burke argued that a large part of persuasion is identification: "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (Burke, 1950 p.21). It is this commonality that draws us in since we all desire to be connected to something or someone. Burke asserts that because there is a division between human beings – each individual being a separate entity – they seek the ability to identify and communicate with others in order to overcome the feeling of separation (Quigley, 1988). Although we are separated physically, humans are alike in their physical substance which connects all humans together – what Burke refers to as consubstantiality – which leads to an ambiguity in our separation since humans are "...both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (Burke, 1969 p.21). This ambiguity in human separation works as an avenue for persuasion since "...the human need to identify provides a rich resource for those interested in joining us or, more importantly persuading us" (Quigley, 1988 para. 4). As Blakesley states "[f]or Burke, our passion is the desire for what he calls consubstantiality or 'shared substance' and represents an unconscious desire to identify with others. Consubstantiality can be achieved by different means, including the devices of form . . . The problem we face every day is that we cannot be consubstantial. We

cannot identify with another except by way of fantasy, since we are distinct bodies animated in our own ways even as we share common sensations” (2001 p.15-6).

Both of those concepts are not only relevant for film but television as well, especially reality television. Although written long before reality television’s existence, Kimberling (1987) describes why there is a power in identification and consubstantiality: “Aspects of the ordinary world are most often presented in popular because they facilitate *audience identification* with the patterns of experience symbolized by the work” (p.82 emphasis in original). People may personally identify with a plot that they can relate to or a character with similar personality traits or similar struggles, and it is this similarity between the viewer and the character that creates identification (Kimberling, 1987). There is a great deal of power in identification beyond just seeing oneself in a character. As O’Donnell asserts “[i]dentification between the viewer and a television program...has the capability to influence the viewer to become involved to the point where he or she may adopt certain ways of speaking, clothing styles, mannerisms or even attitudes and behaviors” (2007 p.144).

Identification is a rhetorical strategy that *Snapped* heavily relies on, though at face value it may not seem this way. The women profiled each week are obviously separated from the viewers by being identified as killers, but during the beginning of the show viewers are shown a woman completely opposite the murderess they are left with. Every episode begins with introducing the woman’s childhood, family, education and career before she eventually meets the husband/boyfriend/lover that she ends up killing. Before she meets her victim, the woman is portrayed as normal and sane as well as having the same experiences as the majority of the audience. The show highlights the women’s

ordinary home life and their experiences in high school. The show discusses how they liked to hang out with friends and go to the senior prom. The show also picks a variety of women from different backgrounds. Some come from single parent households, other women have married parents and a few are even adoptees. Although many of the women come from different backgrounds as adults most of the women are middle class to upper middle class. The diversity of these women's upbringings as well as their similarity in class status to the audience makes these "snapped" women even easier to identify with because audience members only need to watch a few episodes in order to find a woman's story that mirrors their own.

It is not a coincidence that the women *Snapped*'s producers choose are relatable to audience members; in fact, the show picks women specifically to create identification within the viewer. According to the show's producer most of the women portrayed are "subjects the average viewer can relate to," at least to a certain extent (qtd. in Kingston, 2008 p. 121). "Indeed, the program serves as reality-check TV for its stressed, overscheduled viewers who probably harbor a few husbandicide fantasies of their own" (Kingston, 2008 p. 121). The viewers and the murderesses of *Snapped* are able to identify because of their shared experiences and desires.

The fact that female audience members are made to fear the woman they had earlier identified with creates a foundation for catharsis within the show. In *Poetics* Aristotle asserts, "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of a noble and complete action, having the proper magnitude; it employs language that has been artistically enhanced . . . ; it is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such incidents" (Aristotle, 1981 p.11). As

was stated earlier, female audience members are able to see in these murderers something akin to themselves, but they are able to take solace in the fact their own decisions did not end as tragically as these women's. The audience pities these "snapped" women's unfortunate decisions, in some ways understanding the tensions and stresses that caused them but knowing they themselves would never do the same thing. Through the woman's act of violence the audience also grows to fear the woman, but it is not just the woman that they fear but what she represents. Each of these "snapped" women threatens the social order both by their crime and by their gender. The woman's crime has undermined the rule of law and has now threatened the stability of the social order. Her crime signifies a possible disintegration of the rule of law which creates fear of chaos. The fear described thus far only refers to the woman's crime and her expected behavior as an individual not as a woman. Within the social order, patriarchal values are infused which place women in subordinate positions so they do not pose a societal danger. When these women murder, they not only threaten social order but patriarchal order by negating their passive and subordinate role. This creates a dual fear for the audience because two forms of order are being disrupted.

The two contradictory emotions that manifest within *Snapped* create an emotional tug of war for the audience. The pity audience members feel moves them towards the "snapped" woman, but the fear audience members feel moves them away from her. This experience is relieved by the conclusion in which order is restored and the audience can vicariously purge their emotions of fear and pity, and along with it any tensions they may have harbored against the social order that oppresses them. As Aristotle (1981) states in *Poetics* the audience is relieved by the conclusion of the story since the rule of law is

ultimately restored. In *Snapped* the women are almost always convicted and sent to jail, and in the cases in which they are not the entire episode becomes a trial and conviction because each episode focuses on criticizing and demonizing the woman's promiscuity, selfishness and other unfeminine traits. Instead of receiving an actual punishment in the form of a jail sentence these women are subjected to a social punishment in which their iniquities are vividly highlighted for *Snapped's* audience.

Catharsis, for Aristotle, served a social and rhetorical function in that it builds up emotions of pity and fear when a primary character makes a poor decision or breaks with societal norms. The audience is able to pity these types of characters because of their decisions but fears them for their representation of possible chaos. When the narrative is resolved by the character being punished and the rule of law being restored, the audience no longer needs to fear possible chaos. This serves a social function in two ways. First, it reaffirms the rule of law by showing that the character that disturbs the social order will be punished and therefore restore normalcy. Second, it allows the audience to vicariously take part in the societal transgression the character has enacted and once the resolution is reached audience members can purge the tensions that may have been dormant before they viewed the show.

Burke furthered Aristotle's theory saying that pollution is "the subject of catharsis" (Rueckert 1969 p.392). "In tragedy, pollution – tensions, irresolutions, psychoses, guilt, discord – is exploited for cathartic purposes. All manner of 'personal' tensions are exploited in the tragic imitation to heighten the cathartic effect. The members of the audience make a direct personal identification with these tensions and react to them in the most profound and personal way; their reactions are *self*-directed even though it is

[the character] whom they pity” (Rueckert, 1969 p.392). There is an emotional investment in these characters because they work as “symbolic mirrors” in which we see a small part of ourselves in them, so what happens in the fantasy of the drama in some ways becomes a reality internally for the audience. The character’s actions are imbued with meaning that connects him/her to the audience and the conclusion of the drama – or in the case of this thesis, the end of an episode in which a woman is sent to jail – releases the tension that has built up inside the audience. This same function is produced for the female audience that watches *Snapped*; they are able to revel in the ability of *Snapped*’s gender deviants to enact violence they never could. It must be noted that this essayist is not trying to argue that every women wants to murder their significant other; instead, women rarely enact violence since patriarchal society punishes women that do, as will be discussed in the next section, so when women see other women breaking this taboo there is thrill in such actions. In his book, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (1977), Cawelti addresses why audiences are so attracted to crime dramas and detective series and although *Snapped* doesn’t fall under those categories as a television show the idea is still applicable. These shows, like *Snapped*, give the audience a sense of fulfillment because the criminal being portrayed – or the "snapped" woman being showcased – can act out what the audience never could. That is not to say that everyone wants to murder or rob a bank, the fantasy surrounding shows like this is not the criminal action but rather its symbolic meaning. By engaging in criminal activity, the criminal is breaking away from societal norms and defying all forms of power; it is that bold gesture that creates the ultimate fantasy in the minds of the audience. By identifying with the criminal the

audience can engage in imagined transgressions without the actual punishment of the crime.

WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

One of the appeals of the show is its focus on gender deviants. Women are not thought to be violent nor are they encouraged to be, so women enacting violence that is not deemed acceptable has a particular allure. In patriarchal social order women are expected to be passive and are not rewarded for violence where men are. James Gilligan in *Preventing Violence* (2001) argues that men are taught to be violence-objects and women are taught to be sex-objects.⁴ Gilligan states that the roles engendered by patriarchy don't offer women the same incentive as men for their violence. Men have long been taught that violence is a way of expressing and proving their masculinity. As Gilligan states, "men can prove their manliness, their masculine sexual adequacy, when it has been called into question by an insult or a sign of disrespect by means of violence; and their failure or unwillingness to engage in violence can throw their manliness in doubt and expose them to shame" (2001 p.57). In order to explain his theory he looks at the various ways men and women are shamed. Gilligan asserts that men and women are socially constructed to be dichotomous and unequal. Male shame comes from any connection he has to a woman. Insults like "pussy," "bitch," "coward" and "faggot" are particularly potent because they challenge a male's ability to be a violence-object by likening him to

⁴ Some have argued that women's lack of violent tendencies is a hormonal issue (Dabbs and Hargrave, 1997; Kalat, 2008), saying that women have less testosterone and therefore lack a strong hormonal predisposition to violence the way men do. For the focus of this thesis this theory will not be utilized and instead James Gilligan theory on "asymmetrical gender roles" will be used as a feminist theory to explain the gender discrepancy in gender violence.

a woman. Women, on the other hand, are insulted based on their chastity; insults like “whore,” “slut” and “tramp” all undermine a woman’s worth which in patriarchal culture is based on a woman’s ability to stay a virgin or be faithful in heterosexual marriage. “[W]omen are not shamed for being too submissive, dependent, unaggressive, or sexually inactive or impotent, as men are, but rather for the opposite traits: being too rebellious, independent, aggressive and sexually active. Thus, if a woman responds to shame by becoming aggressive or violent, that may only lead to more shame rather than, for men, to less – violence on the part of women is regarded, according to patriarchal values, as ‘unfeminine’” (p.58). Women are not only shunned for enacting the taboo of murder but also for the taboo of being violent as a woman. Also the “asymmetrical gender roles” that patriarchal culture offers women may led them to believe they are not capable of violence or that violence may not be an advantageous avenue for them not only because of the social stigma attached to it but because they may not see it as an effective method.

Women depicted in television shows, and most of popular culture, are depicted within a Madonna/whore binary in which females that are “good” are passive, docile and gentle (Gunter & Harrison, 1998). “According to this scheme those who conform to the idealized conceptions of ‘femininity’ – gentleness, passivity, maternity – would never commit a violent crime. Any woman who turns to violence or criminality is, by definition, deviant and bad since in doing so she has abandoned her natural feminine role. With respect to murderesses particularly, their crime is not seemingly just that of killing another human being, but more significantly of having betrayed their womanhood” (Gunter & Harrison, 1998 p.137).

While *Snapped*'s stories would make one believe that women are more violent than they actually are, the show does portray one thing accurately: when women do kill – according to criminologists – they kill someone very close to them (Michels et al. 2009). What *Snapped* likes to ignore is why women kill people that close to them. According to James Alan Fox a Northwestern criminologist, “When a murder is committed by a female, it’s more likely to be self-defense...” (Michels et al. 2009 para 7). Jensen, author of *Why Women Kill: Homicide and gender equality* states,

Prior to committing homicide, women must often face situations that directly relate to their location within a gender-stratified society. Homicide by women is often directly linked to domestic violence, desperation and fear around parenting, and involvement with men who are criminals. Thus women are more likely to commit homicide when they are victimized, trapped by traditional expectations and denied adequate resources to escape bad domestic situations that lead to desperation and inescapable and unbearable life situations (Jensen, 2001 p.2).

The skewed version of reality that *Snapped* portrays is a dangerous one. Many women who are currently in prison may be there for unjustifiable reasons: “At least half of all women in prison, including those jailed for nonviolent offences, were abused by spouses before their incarceration” (Talvi, 2005 para 9). Prior abuse may signify that the woman was forced into a life or death situation. Margo and Daly (1993) state that women who leave their batterers are at a 75% greater risk of being killed by the batterer than those who stay. Also many women may be economically dependent on their abuser so leaving an abusive situation may be opting to live a life of poverty. These situations force

women to choose between their life and the life of their abuser with little to no other recourse. Angela Browne, a domestic violence researcher, found that “women who kill men in self-defense -- and where there is evidence of severe assault prior to the killing -- are acquitted only 25 percent of the time” (“The Glendale Commission””, 2006 para. 3). National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that “the average prison sentence of men who kill their female partners ranges from two to six years, while women who kill their partners are sentenced to an average of 15 years.” (Leonard, 2002 p.75). The movement to help women who are in jail for defending themselves is hurt by creating a framework in which women can only enact violence out of greed, hatred or lust. “Of all female murder victims, the proportion killed by an intimate has been increasing. Of male murder victims, the proportion killed by an intimate has dropped,” though it would be hard to believe this by watching *Snapped* (“Homicide trends in the U.S.: Intimate Homicide”).

THE MYTH OF FEMININE EVIL

Although there has been a great deal of academic research on female creation myths and the negative stereotypes that surround them, the media seems to ignore the very significant effects of perpetuating these myths in popular culture. In Greek mythology the first woman created was Pandora whom Zeus created for the sole purpose of torturing and punishing mankind. Christianity’s version of Pandora has manifested in the form of Eve, and while society may think such archaic stories don’t affect the way we look at the modern day woman, they do: “The fact is, however, that the myth has projected a malignant image of the male-female relationship and the ‘nature’ of women

that is still deeply embedded in the modern psyche” (Daly,1985 p.45). As Hays, author of *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil* (1964), states, “the fall of man should rightly be called the fall of woman because once more the second sex is blamed for all the trouble in the world” (p.81).

It is because of this myth that all women are believed to have inherited sin from their biblical mother. St. Augustine wrote: “[w]hat is the difference whether it is in a wife or in a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any other woman” (Smith, 1989 p.204). Through this dormant evil that was thought to exist in everywoman, the myth of feminine evil was birthed. Working as evidence to prove the danger women posed, the myth of Eve and feminine evil has become one of the strongest weapons in patriarchy’s arsenal. Throughout history the virulent loathing of women and their connection to Eve (and therefore evil) becomes evident in laws, domestic violence, rape and the mass slaughter of women during the European witch hunts:

During [this time], thousands of women were tortured and murdered when woman-as-Eve was transformed into woman-as-witch. The infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* - a document produced by two Dominican monks who were appointed by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 to investigate and stamp out witchcraft - states that '*all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable*'. The charges leveled against witches included every misogynistic sexual fantasy harbored by the monks and priests who officiated over the witch hunts: witches copulated with the devil, devoured new-born babies and rendered men impotent.

A whole chapter of *Malleus* is entitled: “*How, as it were, they Deprive Man of his Virile member*” (Kitzinger, 1990 para. 6 emphasis in original).

The potency of the myth of feminine evil is rarely recognized by the public: “People no longer take it seriously today, which blinds them from seeing its historical and continuing impact on the West Christian tradition created the myth of the fallen woman and then established as her opposite a woman who was both virgin and mother” (Kelly, 2002 p.216). Eve still holds a prominent place in pop culture, especially in *Snapped*. She has been reconceptualized as the evil temptress and is now fetishized by popular culture as a greedy and dangerous woman with an insatiable sexual appetite. “In the fashion magazines, jean designers display an endless succession of anorexic models who try their best to look as hungry and dangerous as possible” (Dijkstra, 1996 p.5). There is a danger in perpetuating this myth: “The attitude of negativity on the part of the male is directed against women. This, clearly, was the prevailing psychological climate which engendered the myth and sustained its credibility. However there is more to the problem than this. The myth has provided legitimization not only for the direction of the self hatred of the male outward against women, but also for the direction inward on the part of women. As long as the myth of feminine evil is allowed to dominate human consciousness and social arrangements, it provides the setting for women’s victimization” (Barnett, 1997 p.49). These myths live on in *Snapped* and their current stranglehold both in this show and in other areas of popular culture is important to recognize for its persuasiveness and the danger it poses. Although Pandora and Eve may not seem completely relevant to the scope of this thesis, it is important to have a

historical understanding of where the myth of feminine evil came from and how the stories that created the myth are still very much alive today, only the modern Pandoras and Eves of popular culture demonstrate the myth of feminine evil in a much more covert manner.

CHAPTER TWO: REALITY VERSUS FICTION: WOMEN AS VIOLENT MURDERERS

This chapter will focus on background information surrounding the show as well as information regarding the truth about lethal female violence. The first section will discuss the show's success and the creation of the network in order to prove the relevancy of this study and highlight the context surrounding the show. The network is also pertinent to discuss because it gives clues to the audience that is targeted for the network in general and *Snapped* specifically. Information regarding the demographics of the audience for *Snapped* was not available so commercials were utilized in order to better understand the makeup of the audience. This fact is not only important in understanding who is watching but it also furthers the theory of a later chapter that focuses on catharsis. If the audience is homogenous and can identify with the women showcased on *Snapped* in aspects of race, class and gender then this creates a foundation for catharsis since the audience members can identify with the women they are seeing on their television screens. The last part of the chapter will discuss the backgrounds and motives of female killers in order to show the very large inaccuracy that *Snapped* is promoting on its show.

NETWORK AND SHOW SUCCESS

In February 2000, when the Oxygen network first started, it attracted a great deal of fanfare, some of which was due to the high-profile backers involved in the creation of

the network, particularly Oprah Winfrey (Carter, 2009). The network was started, according to its website, “to fill a void in the television landscape -- creating a network targeted to younger women.” In a sense, it was to be the younger and cooler daughter of the Lifetime channel. The network began with shows like *Bliss*, a show bringing women’s sexual fantasies to life, *Oprah After the Show*, *Talk Sex with Sue Johanson*, and *Campus Ladies*, a show that followed two 40-something year old women and the comedic experiences they had by returning to school and living in a college dormitory. *Snapped* was an odd fit with some of the other shows on the network, but it soon found its place as one of the highest rated shows for Oxygen. Even with the new ensemble of shows such as *The Bad Girls Club*, *Love Game* and *Tori & Dean: Home Sweet Hollywood*, it continues to succeed. It is the longest running hit franchise on Oxygen and season six “delivered record viewership among key demos,” based on Nielsen Media Research data (Futon Critic, 2008 para. 3).

According to the show’s website *Snapped* has been extremely profitable for the network. In 2008, the show “contributed to April's success with its highest telecast ever on April 27, as it became the fourth Oxygen telecast this year to top one million viewers, with 1.03MM total viewers” (Futon Critic, 2008 para. 5). The show has steadily increased in success and the show now airs hour long episodes as opposed to the half hour episodes it was airing in earlier seasons. The network states that it has steadily increased viewership among its most coveted group that has been termed “Generation O”: “The network has labeled its audience as ‘Generation O,’ which targets the 18-49 demo while ‘hyper focusing’ on women 18-34. It's defined as young trenders who

consume heavily and influence others' spending patterns" (Nordyke, 2008 para 5). In 2007, when NBC bought Oxygen, Jeff Zucker, president and CEO of NBC, stated that "[t]his acquisition increases our foothold in the advertiser-coveted young, upscale, female demographic, and perfectly complements our current roster of cable channels and plays to our strength of running and operating cable networks'...Oxygen would be part of a 'virtual network' that, combined with Bravo, iVillage and the 'Today' show, would be able to sell large numbers of young affluent women to advertisers" (Lafayette, 2007 para. 4-5).

The network has gone to great lengths to rebrand itself in order to entice advertisers. In 2008, the network changed its tagline to "'Live Out Loud,' which is intended to represent women who 'like to look good, feel good and have fun living life on their own terms'" (Nordyke, 2008 para 4). And having fun and living life on their own terms are very apparent themes on most of the network's shows such as *The Bad Girls Club*, *Pretty Wicked*, *Love Games*, *The Naughty Kitchen* and *Addicted to Beauty*: "[t]hese days, any time you turn on Oxygen you'll see the target audience getting what it wants....during the premiere episode of *Snapped* -- Oxygen's new true-crime documentary series about women on the edge of insanity -- horny, homicidal twins named Peggy and Betty plot to kill one twin's husband" (Heintz, 2004). Whether it is having sex with a guy from a club, getting inebriated or punching a roommate, Oxygen chooses to showcase a very limited version of having fun and feeling good. While these shows highlight the debauchery of "living life on their own terms," *Snapped* shows the much darker and more dangerous side of this lifestyle and it is one of the few shows that focuses on women who pose a real societal threat.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND ADVERTISEMENTS

Information regarding the demographics of the audience was not available. In order to gain insight into the audience's makeup, the show's commercials were analyzed. *Snapped* works to attract particular types of individuals to the show and it is marketers that capitalize on this audience through purchasing airtime for their commercials. While actual demographic numbers cannot be attained from looking at the show's commercials, what can be understood is the general makeup of the audience in its gender, class, age and race. Advertisers choose shows that attract audiences who will buy their products and they also tailor their commercials to the particular audience that they are speaking to. Both of these components of the advertisements will help to better understand who is watching *Snapped*.

The advertisements focused on for this thesis were the ones aired during the last two seasons, seasons 7 and 8, which encompass early 2010, 2009 and late 2008. Of the ads viewed, most were geared towards selling products related to beauty or health. Weight loss products and hair and makeup were the most common products sold, which clearly targets a female audience. The Total Gym fitness center, L'Oreal makeup, and John Frieda hair care products were some of the most popular brands advertised. Clearly, these advertisements are addressing an audience that has the time, money and desire to focus on their appearance which traditionally is thought to be females, but this also spoke to a particular class of women.

Many of the advertisements pointed to the audience as being middle to upper class. Advertisements for Wal-Mart, McDonalds and other companies and/or products that cater to the working class were not present. While some products like those listed

above are not thought to be on the more expensive end of cosmetic products, others like Total Gym fitness as well as birth control products like “Plan B Onestep” and “Nuva Ring” demonstrate that marketers see the *Snapped* audience as having enough disposable income to spend on luxury products. Both the inexpensive and more expensive products are most commonly targeted to those in the middle to upper classes. The class demographic of *Snapped* that becomes evident in the commercials aired matches with the target demographic of the network. Oxygen’s rebranding strategy, as was stated earlier, was to attract young trendsetting and affluent women. This same strategy is clearly present on *Snapped* as well.

Although Oxygen states they are focusing on an audience that could be as old as 49, the network’s “‘hyper focusing’ on women 18-34” was very apparent. Ads for Botox or other age reversing beauty products, which are very common on network television, were not very prevalent. Most of the products in the advertisements made evident Oxygen’s focus on a younger audience. For instance, the commercial for Proactive, which aired regularly, was geared towards audience members in that hyper focused demographic. Mostly young women were portrayed and the spokeswoman, Julianne Hough, is in her very early 20’s. There were also birth control products that were advertised such as “Nuva Ring” and “Plan B Onestep,” which are also traditionally geared to younger women.

The focus on such a young audience was surprising, especially for *Snapped*, which seems to be one of the shows that would attract older audience members with its focus on less juvenile plot lines as well as its inclusion of middle-aged and older women on the show, who are absent on most other shows on the Oxygen network. Shows like

Bad Girls Club and *Love Games* follow a format more closely resembling that of MTV, where *Snapped* would resemble the format of TruTv and other networks that use documentary style shows that attract a much older audience. Also the women profiled on *Snapped* are usually in their late 30's all the way up to their mid 50's and sometimes even in their 60's. In a sea of shows about young women finding love through "thong scavenger hunts" and drinking competitions or shows about beautiful women fighting and competing against each other to be crowned the most beautiful, *Snapped* seems to stand out as the show with a more mature and dignified nature, though this seems ironic given the show's content.

Although most of the ads seem to be catered to a younger audience, there is a nod to an older audience that might be interested in the show. For instance, a commercial for "Life Watch," a product that insures an elderly individual can always call for help, showed a daughter, who seemed to be in her mid to late forties, worried about her mother falling and not being able to get up. This theme of caretaking was also present in other ads but was geared towards younger mothers. There was a commercial for "Mucinex Cough Mini Melts" as well as other children's products such as toys. Commercials for products like these may also signal that the audience could be made up of grandparents, especially based on the time these commercials were aired. Some of the commercials being mentioned were aired during the regular schedule while others were aired during the morning marathons of *Snapped* that usually occur during the weekdays.

These commercials were geared towards those that are most likely not working because they are stay at home moms or are retired. Cleaning products, like Kaboom Foamtastic, also represent an older audience by showcasing a mother, who is usually

played by an actress in her late 30's or 40's, keeping the house for her husband and children. What is also interesting about the ads is the change in demographics that are targeted depending on when the ads air. The newest episode always airs on Sunday night, usually with a few episodes running before it or an entire marathon leading up to the episode. Oxygen constantly reruns episodes periodically throughout the week and at different times of the day. *Snapped* is one of the most rerun shows on the network, with 20-38 episodes aired in a given week. The ads discussed so far apply to Sunday, particularly between the hours of 6:00pm - 10:00 pm. When the shows are rerun the ads drastically change.

For ad analysis outside of Sunday, Thursday became the focus for research. On Thursday, Oxygen typically runs marathons starting at 7:30am all the way till 1:30 pm, but can go as late as 4:00 pm or 5:00 pm. The ads became more generic in their approach to gender. Ads for KFC, The Lord's Place, Fast Cash, 1-800-Credit Card Debit and 21st Century Auto Insurance were the most common advertisers. The approach to gender also switched at one point when three CSS Sports ads were aired clearly targeting men. One ad showed a man watching the network while his girlfriend sat beside him and then offered to him food. The woman talked about how she loved the network and displayed her knowledge of sports; she then says she will get him a beer and when she leaves, the two men on TV screen say that she is "a keeper." Another CSS Sports ad shows four men who are all dismayed at their inability to discuss football because of the season being over. Then one decides that they can discuss spring football and all the men start shouting happily. The ad ends by promoting the "Spring Football" radio show.

These ads may signal that the network believes that males are watching the show, but these ads seemed largely out of place with the other more gender neutral ads. It could be argued that ads for a sports network could still be geared towards women that have a love of sports that is atypical for their gender. For the second ad mention this isn't likely since non woman was featured in the ad, but for the second ad this could be true. Even though the woman didn't play a prominent role in the ad, the commercial could be geared to women who want to be seen as desirable for their love of sports.

As the Thursday marathon progressed so did the demographics. More ads appeared to be geared towards mothers such as ads about the food pyramid and making sure your child has a balanced diet. Ads for cleaning products depicting mothers cleaning the house and doing laundry were very common. The older audience that Oxygen could easily target with *Snapped* seems to be, as far as the ads show, watching in the morning or during the weekday marathons, most likely when the show's younger trendsetting demographic is either waking up after a night of partying or off to work.

FAN ANALYSIS AND SHOW PROMOTION

Originally, this thesis was to include an analysis of the audience's interpretation of *Snapped*. The methodology proposed was virtual ethnography in which the researcher would access fan readings of the show from online message boards. Unfortunately, this methodology greatly strained any productive analysis of the audience; there were very few fan interpretations to analyze. Ultimately what became more fruitful for analysis was not what was present on the show's website but rather what was missing. An interesting discovery was made showing that Oxygen seems to discourage *Snapped*'s fan interaction

on its website, and audience members seem to lack a great desire to interact with the show through the internet. This can be seen on Oxygen's message boards. In terms message boards, the popularity of them for other shows, in comparison to *Snapped*, was quite astounding. As of the first week of April 2010, there were four pages of messages on *Snapped*'s message board and for the *Bad Girls Club* there were two hundred forty one. *Tori & Dean: Home Sweet Hollywood* and *Love Games*, two of the newer shows on Oxygen – *Love Games* is only in its first season – , gained much less attention with only 16 and 8 pages for their message boards, but when looking at how long the shows have been televised in comparison to *Snapped*, it seems odd. *Snapped* is entering its tenth season and has been Oxygen's longest running series.

Snapped seems to be one of the least promoted shows in terms of audience interaction. On the message boards, fans can post comments about the show and also post comments on another fan's post. On the *Snapped* message board not only do less fans comment on the message board, but there are less posts to each individual message. On the *Bad Girls Club* message board each message posted gained anywhere from 40 – 60 comments, though very controversial topics got as many as 250 comments. *Love Games* averaged about 8 – 12 comments per post and *Tori and Dean: Home Sweet Hollywood* averaged about the same, but *Snapped* averaged about 1-3 comments per post. On the *Snapped* message board, there appears to be a large number of "lurkers", or individuals that view postings and comments but do not themselves post (Hines, 2000). This is common of most online communities where most who are involved in the communities do not actively participate. According to Nielsen, "[i]n most online communities, 90% of users are lurkers who never contribute, 9% of users contribute a little, and 1% of users

account for almost all the action” (2006 para. 1). Within the *Snapped* message board there is even less activity. Based on the number of viewers versus the number of comments posted, those that comment only make up anywhere between .0008 to .005 percent of the community, meaning that the *Snapped* message board is more heavily, and unusually, comprised of lurkers. Thus far, only the message board on Oxygen’s website has been discussed. That has been the focus so far because there are few other avenues for fans to interact. There are only six *Snapped* fan pages on Facebook, and – as far as this essayist is aware – there are no fan club pages. Also on sites devoted to television, such as Television without Pity, there are no discussions for the show, so the Oxygen message board would be the primary site where fans would interact.

Snapped’s very small fan community was not the only interesting discovery on Oxygen’s website. The network also uses consumerism as a way of extending the fan experience of the show. The network uses “ShopOhollic” as a component of their website to sell all sorts of products relating to its shows such as yoga pants with “pretty wicked” written on them and *Bad Girl* necklaces. They also have a Home Sweet Hollywood collection, which include hoodies with “Mom” and “Dad” written on them, and the website also promotes Tori’s new line of children’s clothing as well as a *Bad Girls* collection, which includes jewelry, underwear and makeup. Although this may seem like just a ploy by Oxygen to make a profit off the products it creates, it is significant to note that these lines of clothing give audience members the ability to become part of the shows. A woman can become a “bad girl”, not just by wearing the mere label of “bad girl” but also by purchasing items that fit into the lifestyle of a bad girl. For instance,

Oxygen sells an eye mask, but the picture advertising the product shows a topless male wearing it, while a female stands beside him touching and making a seductive expression. Other items include a champagne glass set, “glam on the go” kit and thong underwear. Clearly the network is employing identification with many of its shows by selling such products in which audience members can not only discuss and relive the show but also become one of the characters on the show.

The show also sells more generic items that represent the Oxygen brand, but no items for *Snapped*. Another place that *Snapped* is conspicuously missing is in Oxygen’s “quizOlicious” page, in which the network extends the experience of the shows by testing audience knowledge about the individuals on the shows or by giving audience members the opportunity to see what character they most resemble. Examples of such quizzes are “How well do you know Tori & Dean: Home Sweet Hollywood?”, “Who’s your “Pretty Wicked” alter ego?”, “Which girl from Bad Girls Club Season 3 are you?”, “ANTM [American’s Next Top Model] Season 6 Trivia” and “Can you throw a party like Tori Spelling?” Oxygen also promotes fan interaction through its “quizOlicious” live function which lets fans access a Google map that shows them other fans who are taking quizzes by giving fans the location of other fan on a map and the title of the quiz each person is taking. It then invites you to take a quiz that someone near you is taking or has just recently taken, making the experience of quiz taking more of a community based activity. All of these components of the website help fans immerse themselves in the show, but “[t]his immersion in the text is arguably different in Reality TV, where – as the term ‘Reality TV’ suggests – the fan isn’t drawn into the world of a ‘fantastic’ world as much

as offered the chance to participate in one that is already meant to be familiar. Fans can get to know the characters intimately and immerse themselves in the situations on screen because the characters are meant to be ‘one of us’, potentially enabling viewers to see themselves on screen” (Foster, 2004 p.247). Oxygen doesn’t seem to encourage fan identification with *Snapped* or the women portrayed on the show. This is evident in the fact that the show gives very few opportunities for fan identification or fan interaction, though it would be frightful to imagine what fan identification would look like. Quizzes like “Which murderess are you?”, “Poison, hit man or gun: What would be your method of choice?” and “How long would it take the cops to catch you?” may not be the type of identification Oxygen wants to promote. What becomes apparent in all of this is that Oxygen does not promote audience interaction among the show’s fans, and fans, based on the lack of activity on the website, seem to have little interest in discussing the show or meeting other fans.

Although fans are able to discuss the episodes on the message board, this one component of fan interaction that is available is hardly being utilized in comparison to other newer shows. Instead, fans are able to see pictures of the crime scenes, extended clips of interviews and pictures of the women, which further highlight the show’s ethos of objectivity. Fans cannot interact in the same way because these women are not to be idolized. As an alternative, Oxygen gives audience members the ability to relive the shows by the further indulging in the gritty details of the crime, which is not the same celebratory theme seen on the rest of the websites for the other shows on the network. *Snapped* represents more of a highway accident from which gawkers cannot look away; the attraction to the show is much different than that of *Bad Girls Club*. Although the

spectacle that is present in all reality shows is there, and very much a part of the audience's attraction to *Snapped*, the attraction here specifically is to the darkness of human nature which is not something most women would want to celebrate.

BEGINNING OF EPISODES AND AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION

Almost all episodes are half an hour in length, though Oxygen has recently moved to an hour long format for its latest season. Each episode opens with a preview of the story, highlighting the most salacious and juicy details of the woman's narrative. The show starts with sound bites from those involved in the case, usually detectives, journalists or family members, to highlight the sensational aspects of the upcoming episode. The statements range from the mundane, "their marriage was a wreck" (Season 7, Episode 13), all the way to the extreme, "she thought she needed human blood because she was an alien reptile queen" (Season 6, Episode 15). Such sound bites are used to entice the audience into the show. The plot lines more commonly resemble the narratives of Hollywood blockbusters with statements like "there might be some espionage involved" (Season 7, Episode 19) and "the case involved machine guns, mob hits and ménage à trois" (Season 6, Episode 7). After the 30 second introduction to the episode finishes, the screen darkens and moves into the show's opening sequence. The show opens with the graphics of four words – "lies", "deceit", "greed" and "murder" – which are placed over various images that sexualize violence. Images of a woman with long red nails holding a knife and a woman holding a gun up to her mouth, as well as the image of a man lying on the floor covered in blood - emasculated by both his death and the gender

of his killer - illustrate the horrific and sexual nature of these women's crimes. The screen then darkens and opens to the most terrifying word of all: "Snapped!"

These components of the show create these women's stories as sensational and play upon the societal and gender deviance of these woman's crimes. The preview and opening sequence attract viewers by creating these women as extreme caricatures of the deviance they represent. The societal deviance that attracts viewers is evident on other crime shows as well. In "Mixed Messages: Images of Domestic Violence on Reality Television," Carmody asserts that "[f]or decades researchers have argued that television provides us with half-truths by only reflecting crime that is interesting, exciting and sensational" (1998 p.159). It would be unfair to criticize only *Snapped* for showcasing crime in such a manner since *Snapped* is one of many crime shows, both fictional and real, that do the same thing. According to Jermyn, ". . . the enduring attraction that lies at their core is the *spectacle of reality*, a pleasure which proceeds the television crime appeal and which Reality TV explores and exploits with a renewed enthusiasm" (2004 p.72 emphasis in original). However, *Snapped* ignores the main reason women kill. Episodes of women surviving domestic violence through killing their abusive husbands do not have the same appeal of stories like that of Diane Zamora (Season 1, Episode 10) in which her boyfriend's infidelity leads the two high school sweethearts to kill the "other woman."

Every *Snapped* episode focuses on what caused the woman to "snap" and the grave consequences of such an occurrence. The beginning of the episode always starts by giving the audience a snapshot of the woman's very normal life. Although the show's opening sequence starts by creating a clear division between the salacious and outlandish

nature of the "snapped" woman and the audience, the show then takes a drastic turn by highlighting common characteristics of the woman's early life and upbringing. Many of the women profiled on *Snapped* had common lives, living middle class and upper middle class lifestyles. Their experiences are similar to the everyday experiences of most of the audience especially because the audience is similar to the "snapped" women in gender and class. For instance, Lynda Taylor was described as the "cute blonde" and as being "very popular at school" (Season 2, Episode 10). Her regular activities consisted of "hanging out in the mall and cruising in her Honda CR-V." Nikki Ribul, another "snapped" woman, is described as "pretty, popular and petite" and she is commended for "excel[ing] at Windsor Forest High School" (Season 4, Episode 8).

Even in cases where women grow up in difficult situations, the show still highlights the most positive aspects of their lives. For instance, Yesenia Patino grew up in a very poor working class neighborhood, but what is highlighted about her story is how her family worked hard to make a living and that they did the best to provide for each other (Season 3, Episode 2). The show highlights the very ordinary experiences each of these women have had by outlining their family life as well as their experiences in high school.

It is the division created between the woman and the audience that entices people to the show, but it is the identification that keeps them interested. The beginning of the narrative usually starts with describing the woman's background. Although the show chooses women who are enormously similar with each other in their devious and ruthless characteristics, the show paints a picture of women with diverse pasts. Women growing up with single mothers, women in happy families, as well as women who were adopted

are all profiled. This diversity of backgrounds makes the "snapped" women much easier to identify with since audience members, at some point, can see a part of their lives in one of these women. At the same time, this adds to the allure of the show since it doesn't pinpoint what early signs might be revealed in order for society to prevent women like these from "snapping" as will be discussed in chapter two. Showing normal women who vary in their upbringing and personality also furthers the idea that all women are inherently evil.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE SHOW

Snapped positions itself as an objective chronicler of these women's stories, showing the true stories of how and why women kill. The show functions to explain female crime in order to give society a way of understanding this form of social aberration. The goal of the show is to present each side of the case for the audience, but, of course, this not what actually happens. There is a very clear ideology present in the show that promotes the idea of female deviance, but this is hidden by *Snapped's* ethos of objectivity which is created through various visual and narrative components.

Throughout the show a very cold and menacing female voice tells the stories of these women's crimes, and interspersed throughout the narration are pictures and home videos which make the narrative seem more authentic. This is a common practice of true crime shows because "[t]he low-grade video image has become *the* privileged form of TV 'truth telling', signifying authenticity and an indexical reproduction of the real world; indexical in the sense of presuming a direct and transparent correspondence between what is in front of the camera lens and its taped representation" (Dovey, 2000 p. 55). The

show also uses video footage of the crime scene as well as pictures taken by the detectives on the case, which spare no gritty detail. Pictures of bodies with multiple stab wounds as well as close ups of the stab wounds can be seen in certain episodes. Blood splatter, bruises on the deceased and the murder weapons are shown in order to give the audience an up-close look at how the murder was conducted. In many ways the audience becomes the detective. All the evidence is laid out for the audience and as more evidence is discovered the audience receives it in the same order the detectives did. In between pieces of evidence, the audience hears interviews with police officers about the conclusions that were made at that time. The police officers speak in the present tense, as though they are discovering the evidence at the same time the audience does, which further brings the audience in as an investigator. As the story unravels, this process continues and when the "snapped" woman finally goes to trial, the audience becomes a jury member listening to both sides of the case.

Both of these components hide the fact that *Snapped* highlights more evidence that points towards the woman's guilt rather than her innocence. Shows like *Snapped* "are grounded in law and order ideologies that emphasize crime control and authority" (Fishman & Cavender, 1998 p.14). While most crime shows emphasize authority and control for a traditionally male criminal, *Snapped* emphasizes control of women who exhibit a dangerous form of agency and hostility by airing interviews in which individuals criticize them and by also highlighting the woman's punishment for her crime. Throughout the show these women are punished for not only the murder they have enacted but also for the way they have transgressed their gender role. They are characterized as aggressive both physically and sexually. Friends and family members

both of the woman and the deceased are used to illustrate the woman acting outside gender ideals in her domineering, selfish, cold and unemotional ways. The theme of law and order is also present in the backdrop of the interviews which show dark pictures of a courtroom, a person handcuffed, and a jail cell.

These women are convicted of their crimes by a trial which is shown at the end of *Snapped*, but a whole other trial is conducted during the show in regards to the woman's gender deviance. The show uses interviews of various individuals involved with the crime from detectives, jurors, attorneys, journalists and those familiar with the people involved in the crime. Each of them testifies as to how the woman broke the expectations of her gender. Comments about how she was not the grieving widow she should have been, how she seemed more interested in selfish pleasures, how she did not stay at home as often as she needed or how she seemed wicked and greedy all work to indict the woman as a gender aberration.

Experts are also used by the show to better explain the women's behavior. These individuals also play into *Snapped's* thematic approach to lethal female violence in which women are conniving and evil and try anything to get away with murder. One female criminal psychologist states "It is very common for women to use victimology as a way to get out of murder charges because people give women the benefit of the doubt. They figure that women are the victims and they are the ones being abused" (Season 1, Episode 10). And the jury should assume this because, as was illustrated earlier, this is normally the case. Women who act out in lethal violence are almost always in situations where they are forced to choose their life over that of their boyfriend or husband, but in the reality of *Snapped* this is just a fallacy women have created to get away with murder.

Other visual components help to further the ethos of *Snapped* such as articles from local newspapers and clips from local news shows. The show also uses photos, both personal photos of the women as well as photos taken by journalists. All the photos show the woman in some unflattering light; whether she is making a devious expression or being aggressive or sexually promiscuous, these photos become evidence that brings down the woman's character. The photos are usually shot in a dark light in order to make the women appear devious. The show also uses these photos to slowly tighten in on the woman's eyes while at the same time playing ominous music. Some of the photos are transformed from color to gritty black, which also highlights the dangerous natures of these women because the transformation makes their photos reminiscent of mug shots.

Another visual component the show employs is a series of vignettes in which actors reenact the scene the narrator or another person being interviewed is discussing. In *Entertaining Crime: Television Reality Programs* (1998) Mark Fishman and Gray Cavender discuss the problematic nature of reality crime shows portraying themselves as objective. Fishman and Cavender state, "these programs present these 'realities' in an entertaining way that draws upon the traditions of crime fiction and tabloid journalism. They often violate basic journalistic practices, including attempting objectivity" (p.14). The use of vignettes is something that was started by the show *America's Most Wanted* and is commonly seen in many crime shows. This ethos of objectivity hides an ideology that dangerously undermines the reality that women almost always kill to protect themselves not to get a life insurance policy, but with *Snapped's* journalistic guise the ideology present in the show may be less transparent for audience members as opposed to

other shows that do not possess an objective ethos like that of *Snapped* and *America's Most Wanted*.

WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

Although *Snapped* is an anomaly in the fact that it showcases authentic lethal female violence, the show is situated in a much bigger and historical context in relation to female criminality. *Snapped* plays on a deep-seated fear in our country that women are becoming more violent and at the same that they are getting away with their violence. Because of the double deviance female murderers possess, they are traditionally seen as more dangerous and more likely to get away with their crime. The idea of women's continued violence as well as their ability to escape punishment and blame stems from colonial history and has continued in modern day times by being perpetuated through the media and popular culture. These issues are relevant to *Snapped* because they highlight the context of the show. As Ann Jones, author of *Women Who Kill*, states,

[i]n recent years, the female crime wave and its violence and violent women have been alarmingly described in articles and books; but they were first widely publicized through a book in 1975 called *Sisters in Crime* by Freda Adler, a criminologist who rose to prominence on the strength of a logical fallacy.

Noticing that a renewed women's movement paralleled apparently phenomenal increases in crimes by women, Adler mistakenly concluded that one trend caused the other. The rapid rise in crimes by women, she said, was merely the "shady aspect of liberation" (Jones, 1996 p.2).

What Adler failed to realize was that the increase in crimes was not in violent crimes but rather in larceny and fraud, particularly that of welfare fraud (Jones, 1996). Extreme anxiety exists in regards to women who are violent, especially those that murder. Female murderers create small holes in patriarchal social order, each proving that the system cannot always keep women in passive positions in which they will pose no real threat. Once again it must be stressed, though, that acts of murder are not being condoned or seen as feminist, rather they represent a woman's ability to move beyond the traditional role set out for her and this shift causes a change to patriarchal social order. *Oui* magazine clearly articulates this feeling by stating, “[w]omen criminals today seem to spark a special fear, fantasy and overreaction in male society” (as cited in Jones, 1996 p.4).

It is this fear that seems most potent in society since for years female murderers have been demonized and stereotyped as monstrous. These women are unimaginable for society, and since the idea of female murderers has come into societal consciousness, myths surrounding them have prevailed. They spark hatred and terror: from the Salem Witch Trials to Aileen Wuornos, arguably the most famous female serial killer (Schurman-Kauflin, 2000), these women are seen as individual monsters, rather than as women who may be victims of abuse and great hardship. That is not to say that a female killer should not be seen as responsible for the crime, but that society points to these women individually as fully responsible for the crime, without understanding the path that brought each of the women here. As Jones states, “[s]till, we have not lost the disposition that finds a simple scapegoat for the incalculable complex of factors - social, political, economic - that may rise against us, threatening change or social destruction” (p.4).

A more recent example of this mentality can be seen in the book *Serial Killers: The Method and Madness of Monsters* (2004). In the book Vronsky writes,

[s]o far I have been using the pronoun he when referring to serial killers only, simply to facilitate the flow of words. However, I should be referring to serial killers as he or she, because nearly one out of five serial killers is female. In fact, they are often more deadly and more prolific than typical male serial killers.

Female serial killers are described as the “quiet killers” because they rarely leave bodies dumped by a roadside, which alarm a community. Their killing careers last twice as long for women to the male serial killer's average of just over four years (p. 209).

The fear Vronsky harbors for female murders is clear. He cites them as worse than male killers and highlights their monstrosity by asserting that they kill for longer periods of time and that, individually, some of them produce more victims than some individual male killers. According to Deborah Schurman-Kauflin, author of *The new predator-- women who kill: profiles of female serial killers*, female serial killers “use less detectable ways to kill as compared to their male counterparts such as poison or suffocation instead of knives or guns. As a result, women do not leave physical evidence when they murder, so they can commit their crimes for longer periods of time without being detected” (2000 p.15). Unlike Vronsky, she also does not state that women kill more individuals, but the amount of time, and the lack of violence that Schurman-Kauflin is highlighting, may show that there is a greater restraint on the part of female serial killers, which undermines the idea of female serial killers, and murderesses as well, as irrational victims of inferior and faulty minds. Also female killers may not be the only culprit of the murders

Vronsky is citing. Alarid, Marquart, Burton, Cullen et. al. (1996) conducted interviews with convicted female murderer and found 86% of them assumed a secondary follower role during criminal events by either working with a male or female accomplice.

Vronsky is creating a hierarchy, a rare one in which women would be placed in a superior position, though that position proves them to be more cunning, vile and devious than their male serial killer counterparts. Vronsky creates women to be more dangerous because they are the mythic wolf in sheep's clothing; no one sees them coming, so their ability to attack is that much more effectual. They possess the potent power of surprise and are able to lull their victims into a sense of ease, an ability that males traditionally lack. Vronsky states that twenty percent of serial killers are female, but very few studies have been conducted on the number of female killers. Based on other studies that were found, Vronsky's statistic seems a bit high. According to Davis, author of *Women Who Kill: Profiles of Female Serial Killers* (2001) only 2% of known serial killers are women. Another study by Jenkins, author of *Using murder: the social construction of serial homicide* (1994) finds the number to be a little higher, stating that 15% of serial killers are female.

Unfortunately, these comments are part of larger discourse that fears the violence of women. Not only are women seen as more dangerous because of their ability to trick their victims, but they are also seen as more dangerous because they have an ability to get away with their crime. As Jones (1996) states, "[t]he anxiety – which exaggerates what women are 'getting away with' and blames them for creating the problem in the first place – also rallies the forces of reaction around the bright, deceptive flag of 'equality'. Feminists who ask for equal protection under the law are accused of seeking special

favors” (p.299). Because women are seen as passive, people are more likely to believe that women who do in fact murder will get away with that crime because no one wants to believe they committed it. The idea that women were escaping punishment for murder was a sentiment that Jones was able to trace to early colonial times in which female criminals were sent to America by the English in order to get rid of their undesirables. When these women started committing petty crimes they were more harshly punished than men, but when some of these women started committing murder, mainly against their husbands, the criminal justice system was at a standstill. Women had no place in legal jurisprudence. They weren't traditionally recognized in the civil courts, and they especially were not recognized in the criminal courts. After all, why would they need to be? Except for the few wrongdoers, who were hardly “women” anyway, women didn't commit crime. They were too delicate, pure and fragile to do such a thing. This notion, stemming from colonial times, continued into the 19th century when women were still thought to be unable to enact the cold and calculating act of murder.

When the justice system was faced with such shocking instances of a woman who had murdered her husband, “[a]lways their question was the same: What motive could any woman have for killing her husband? The answer, for the typical nineteenth century trial lawyer, was hard to come by, for he was doubly deluded” (Jones, 1996 p.93). Jones states that there was additional confusion for lawyers because they were not only shocked by a murder committed by a female but even more confused when they had to understand the crime through a legal framework, which required the accused have a motive. This conundrum

was particularly difficult for nineteenth century lawyers to understand because of their equally mistaken notions about women's nature; they did not take women to be reasoning, planning beings, able to act for the sake of some future state of affairs. That women might be capable of such self-determination and control was simply unthinkable. Assuming that women were passive creatures, lawyers usually looked for "motives" outside the woman's volition, in some other agency or force that caused her to behave as she did. They put the blame on menstrual tension, hysterical (i.e., womb-centered) disease, insanity, or a male accomplice (Jones, 1996 p.93).

If only these hapless nineteenth century lawyers had had the benefit of watching *Snapped* in order to better understand the motives of American female killers. Clearly, little has changed of our understanding, or at least the media's understanding, of women's motives for killing. When women's behavior is seen as irrational, even when not involving murder, it is tied to the emotional or some inherently deviant nature in women that must be controlled. Women are still not, as they weren't in the nineteenth century, given full human agency by recognizing their capacity for reasoning and employment of that reasoning in their violent actions. As Jones states it is still "widely believed by the general public and people working in the criminal justice system that vast numbers of women get away with crimes through the operation of chivalry: they are not arrested, or not prosecuted, or not convicted or not sentenced to pay the full price. And since chivalry presupposes guilt, women who are acquitted of criminal charges are not thought to have been exonerated but thought to have gotten away with something" (p.8)

Ironically this view is completely contrary to reality. In the article, "Does Victim Gender Increase Sentence Severity? Further Explorations of Gender Dynamics and Sentencing Outcomes," authors Curry, Lee and Rodriguez (2004) argue that there are no differences in the overall sentencing of criminals purely based on gender, though they did find that other factors could better predict sentencing, such as race being a factor for men but not for women and employment status being a factor for women but not for men. Earlier articles have found a similar trend and show that women, in general, get sentences that are similar to what men receive (Crew, 1991). In particular cases, gender does seem to make a difference, but in the opposite manner than society perceives. As was stated earlier in the introduction, "women who kill men in self-defense -- and where there is evidence of severe assault prior to the killing -- are acquitted only 25 percent of the time" ("The Glendale Commission", 2006 para. 3). The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that "the average prison sentence of men who kill their female partners ranges from two to six years, while women who kill their partners are sentenced to an average of 15 years" (Leonard, 2001 p.75). In the *Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment*, David Levinson (2002) writes, "[m]ore recently, although women who kill are typically thought to be less stable than their typically male counterparts, they are also less likely to receive a custodial sentence for their crimes. Yet, as is the case for male criminals, a female perpetuated murder is occasionally considered so heinous that the killer is given a death sentence" (p.1733). The fact that women are less likely to receive custodial sentences shows the inequity that exists in the criminal justice system. Women are not "getting away with murder"; in fact, many times it is women who are getting the shorter end of the stick: "[p]opular ideology - not the law - was the guideline in women's

cases; so there was no telling where the sentiments of judges and jurors might lead them. When women were acquitted - whether the decision seemed justified or not - newspapers complained that women could get away with murder. In fact, in the capricious criminal justice system, the wind often blew the other way" (Jones, 1996 p.178).

When looking at the statistics regarding the backgrounds of female killers it becomes clear that the deck is stacked against them even before they ever enter the courtroom. Although most killers come from troubled backgrounds that either involve abuse or neglect, women face a much more difficult situation. In comparison to men, women are seven times more to have been sexually abused, 16% more likely to have been physically abused, twice as likely to have been mentally abused, and twice as likely to have had a parent or caretaker that has a mental illness (Yourstone, Lindholm & Kristiansson, 2008). According to the article, "Women who kill: A comparison of the psychosocial background of female and male perpetrators" (2008) authors Yourstone, Lindholm and Kristiansson state, "[h]omicidal women had more severe childhood circumstances, but less aggressive childhood behaviour than did their male counterparts. At the time of the crime, women had a more ordered social situation, had more often been exposed to violence and searched for help than had the men" (p.374). According to Levinson (2002), "[c]ontrary to recent depictions of female murderers in films such as *Thelma and Louise* women who kill are rarely glamorous adventurers" (p.1733). The privileged women on *Snapped* are far from an accurate representation of the true murderess population. These women come from privileged backgrounds and live relatively easy lives. Levinson asserts that the real female murderers "are usually poor, have little education, have tried to kill themselves, attack a man with a criminal record,

have more than one child, have survived physical or sexual abuse, were introduced to a life of crime in their teens by a male and are alcohol or drug abusers” (p.1733).

Narratives describing male killers usually highlight issues of mental instability, abuse in the home or mistreatment of animals, but no such issues seem to exist in the earlier part of "snapped" women's lives. The women usually have had very normal middle class to upper class upbringings, with none of the warning signs that are usually present with killers. Unfortunately, by choosing women who do not possess traits that could provoke alarm, *Snapped* is giving its audience a very inaccurate picture of the reality of female crime. This is just another example of the inaccuracies within *Snapped*. Studies of female “delinquents” dating from as far back as 1920 show clear links between abuse and incest (Jones, 1996). According to Ann Jones, author of *Women Who Kill* (1996), “at least one-third of women in prison today got their start in ‘crime’ as incest victims” (p.10). The rich housewives and jealous temptresses are the women audiences want to hear about. These are the kinds of women that audiences can point to and easily vilify, but this is not the same case with the majority of female murderers. Their lives are full of hardship, abuse and desperation, and accusing these women of coldblooded murder is much harder to do.

The most common reason a woman acts out in violence is to protect herself, and even in those cases the woman was not heartless in her act. In situations of domestic violence, the woman's every behavior is controlled. The man slowly tightens his grasp, not allowing the woman to see her friends or family and then no longer lets her out of the house (Birch, 1994). Andrea Dworkin, a feminist activist and scholar, was also a survivor of domestic violence. Recounting her experiences, she states “I remember withdrawing

further and further into that open grave where so many hide waiting to die – the house....No one misses the wife who disappears....Wives, after all, belong in the home. Nothing outside depends upon them” (as cited in Jones, 1996 p. 296-7). After committing murder these women are not the cold monsters that female murderers are portrayed to be in the media. According to Jones, “[w]omen who kill their battering lovers or husbands almost always express great remorse and sorrow. They say they still love the dead man and grieve at his loss. Some feel so guilty that they try to take their own lives, or say that they would if they did not have children to care for” (320).

The reality that *Snapped* creates is an inaccurate picture of lethal female violence. The show distorts the individual agency of each woman it showcases while at the same time undermining the true reality of why women kill. Most women are forced into situations in which violence is the only way they are able to survive. As the earlier statistics show, women who murder usually come from difficult and abusive backgrounds, and this is another truth that is ignored *Snapped*. The show paints a picture of women who lived privileged and easy lives with husbands/boyfriends who loved and adored them. The real women who need to be focused on have their voices silenced by *Snapped* portraying itself as the authority on lethal female violence. Stories of women surviving domestic violence – or worse, those who don’t survive – are not discussed. The dangerous and violent environments these women come from are overlooked even though they are a more pressing issue as opposed to a woman of privileged background killing her husband for his insurance policy.

CHAPTER THREE: “AND THEN SHE JUST SNAPPED”: SNAPPING, AGENCY
AND HYSTERIA

Snapped constructs itself as having a societal function in which the show gives its audience an easily digestible answer to the question of why women kill. Rather than looking at each woman as an individual with various motives and contexts surrounding her crime, all women can be understood as killing for the exact same reason. As Oxygen so eloquently puts it: “[f]rom socialites to secretaries, female killers share one thing in common: at some point, they all snapped.” The show creates a framework to understand how docile, passive and maternal figures can act out in violence since female felons disturb the symbolic order by breaking both social and gender codes. The "snapped" woman creates a social rupture by the act of killing another, but the most disturbing part of her action is its defiance of feminine passivity. A woman's expected passivity keeps her in a nonthreatening position, but when a woman defies this position, it shows the ineffectiveness of her subordination in keeping society safe from the inherently evil nature that women are seen to possess. While men are seen as the creators of meaning, women are traditionally portrayed as the bearer of meaning (Mulvey, 1975). Their expected passivity makes them an innocuous entity in patriarchal society, but "snapped" women become threatening both in their achievement of creating meaning, and therefore

producing individual agency, and in their act of killing. In their act, they assert themselves as both dangerous and as active members of the symbolic order, but the social rupture caused by the woman's murder is repaired by *Snapped*'s denigration of female murderers.

While violent women have long existed in popular culture, they rarely are portrayed in a way in which they are believed to pose a threat. Women with little body fat or muscle mass taking down men two times their size, like in *Buffy* or *Tomb Raider*, exist only in male fantasies, not in the real world. These ideas further reconfirm women's roles as passive, not because the women aren't being active but because the meaning of their actions is framed within the male gaze. Laura Mulvey argues that “. . . film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle” and this is particularly evident in the male gaze (1975 p. 14). In film and on television “men act and women appear. Men look at women” (Berger, 1972 p. 136). And while the women appear in an act of violence, their violence does not offer them individual agency. Instead, they are present as sexual objects whose violence would never exist beyond the movie screen. Female superheroes and violently deviant women are marked for their sexuality and are present for the viewing pleasure of the male audience. Their objectification as well as the lack of authenticity in their violence makes them nonthreatening. *Snapped* is then an anomaly because it showcases women who not only can murder, but have. These women truly are threatening both in their act and gender. *Snapped* gives its audience a way of comprehending how such women can exist in our society by simplifying these women's acts as that of “snapping.”

DEFINING SNAPPING

The idea of "snapping" is not something new, but its presence in our everyday culture has become more prevalent. From the cases of Dr. Amy Bishop, a professor who gunned down six of her colleagues, to Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, the perpetrator of the Fort Hood shootings, or Joseph Stack, the pilot who flew a plane in an IRS building⁵, "snapping" – or at least what the media characterizes as "snapping" – is happening more often and with diverse perpetrators. *Snapped* seems to play off this fear of seemingly normal individuals acting in ways that seem illogical and completely out of character, but what exactly does it mean "to snap"? In *Snapping: America's epidemic of sudden personality change* (1995), authors Conway and Siegelman define "snapping" as a "sudden, drastic alteration of personality" (p.5). In their book, the two authors do not focus on just the violence that can be associated with "snapping," but instead their research was more broadly focused on dramatic life changes that people make that seem to have no clear catalyst. They further define "snapping" as a

[s]udden change [that] comes in a moment of intense experience that is not so much a "peak" as a precipice and unforeseen break in the continuity of awareness that may leave them detached, withdrawn, disoriented – and utterly confused. The experience itself may produce hallucinations, delusions or render the person extremely vulnerable to suggestion. It may lead to changes that alter lifelong

⁵ Amy Bishop was a biology professor at the University of Alabama at Huntsville. She killed three professors and wounded three others. Nidal Hasan was a U.S. Army major serving as a psychiatrist when he killed 13 people and wounded 30 others on a military base in Texas. Joseph Stack crashed a small plane into an IRS building in Austin, Texas.

habits, beliefs, disrupt friendships, marriages and family relationships, and in extreme instances incite self-destructive, violent or criminal behavior. (p.5)

Of course, *Snapped* would have its audience think that "snapping" can only occur when violence exists, and sanity is no longer present. As Landu (2009) points out “[t]he association between mental illness and snapping is controversial,” especially when most people who are mentally ill are not violent (para. 12). Siegelman in an interview with the *Seattle Times* states, “It is not traditionally a mental disorder, but a disorder caused by intense and stressful life experiences” (as cited in Morris, 2007 para. 15). In the same interview, both Siegelman and Conway state that "snapping" takes time to build up, and there is usually a traceable history one can follow to understand the causes of the outburst (Morris, 2007). A recent article published in *General Archives of Psychiatry* states

that the incidence of violence was higher for people with severe mental illness, but only significantly so for those with co-occurring substance abuse and/or dependence. Multivariate analyses revealed that severe mental illness alone did not predict future violence; it was associated instead with historical (past violence, juvenile detention, physical abuse, parental arrest record), clinical (substance abuse, perceived threats), dispositional (age, sex, income), and contextual (recent divorce, unemployment, victimization) factors. Most of these factors were endorsed more often by subjects with severe mental illness (Elbogen & Johnson, 2009 para. 5).

Swink, of *Psychology Today*, states “[p]eople do not just ‘snap.’ When something horrible happens, like a murder or violent attack, we naturally look for a cause.

‘Snapping’ is an easy way to describe what is actually a complex, yet understandable

chain of events. Research into violent attacks and the behavior of the attackers can shed some light on how one moves down a pathway toward violence” (2010 para. 6). And this is true of all the violent individuals listed earlier. Each of them had a past that either included earlier violence or signs of mental illness. Many psychologists state that traumatic events such as abuse or witnessing violence can be factors in making a person "snap"; feeling hopeless, ashamed or feeling trapped are all warning signs for someone who is about to "snap" (Landu, 2009).

Ironically, these feelings are some of the same ones that women in abusive relationships experience, but *Snapped* rarely showcases this as a part of the women’s violence. Instead, the show not only creates an inaccurate picture of lethal female violence but violence in general. *Snapped* doesn’t show women as experiencing intense and stressful situations even though most women, statistically speaking, experience events like abuse, rape, harassment or discrimination. The women also aren’t seen as having a clear history of mental illness or instability. Many of the "snapped" women lived out the American dream with upper class lifestyles that included husbands and children. Instead, the show portrays “snapping” as a woman who breaks with sanity for no apparent reason; she had it all, and yet it wasn’t enough.

SNAPPING AND AGENCY

When a murderer is understood to have snapped, his or her crime is moved from a mental domain to a physical one. Most murders – that is, murders conducted by men – are understood through a rational framework in which the motive explains the crime. The motive is a reason that, while not condoning the crime, gives society a way to

comprehend how such a horrendous act can occur. The murderer, whether enacting a premeditated crime or not, is seen as having been cognizant of the benefits and consequences of the crime. While the murder may not be seen as a humane or prudent decision, the crime is still seen as an act that in its infancy developed through a thought process. This is opposed to what happens to a "snapped" woman. Though the woman may have planned to kill her husband in order to collect on his life insurance policy, this reasoning is ignored when the crime is framed around the act of "snapping". The logic involved in the crime, which is clearly seen in all the murders of "snapped" women, is negated by the show. The catalyst of the crime is not a motive, but instead hormones. It is then the physicality of the woman rather than her intellect that has caused the crime. This moves the crime from a mental domain in which the woman thought out the crime to a physical one in which her body forced the crime upon her. She becomes a victim of her own sexual organs, and placing corporeal blame on the crime moves it out of a rational/mental domain into an irrational/physical domain.

The two varying domains of the physical and the mental can best be illuminated through the Burkean action/motion distinction⁶. Burke makes an important distinction between the two components as a way of understanding human behavior. Gusfield and Burke assert that, "[i]n the distinction between action and motion he holds up to a rigid stimulus-response social science the critique of determinist models of human beings" (1989 p. 23). Motion, like "snapping," exists in the physical world. As Foss (2002) states, motion "is concerned with bodily processes" (p.182). Since humans are first and foremost

⁶ Though the Burkean action motion distinction does discuss the differences between the body and mind, it is not the same. Rather, the theory is a redoing and extension of the Cartesian mind/body duality.

animals, they are tied to actions that they do not have power over. Motion involves behaviors that are unconscious, instinctive and largely uncontrollable. But of course man, as Burke (1966) defines him, “is [a] symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animal” (p.6), and it is the use of symbols that moves human behavior from motion to action. Action is human behavior that manifests from motives that humans do have control over. As Kiberling asserts “[t]he world of human thought and language . . . implies action . . . [I]ndeed, any social activity among humans falls necessarily within the realm of action since such behavior involves symbolic transformation” (Kimberling, 1982 p. 70). Whereas motion is forced upon humans, inherent to action is free will and choice. In order for an act to be symbolic one must make a decision about the act before it is acted out. If one is to “snap,” this is impossible because “snapping” allows for no *priore* choice to be made.

What is ironic about the show is that no “snapping” is seen. After watching a few episodes it becomes clear that these women are not hysterical murderers but cold and calculating killers:

[M]ost of the *Snapped*'s subjects know exactly what they're doing, even if their reasoning isn't exactly sound: they kill to relieve themselves of men who are interfering with their greater ambitions--or who merely have ticked them off . . . Some are fed up with marriages that failed to fulfill the promise of their 'fairy-tale' wedding . . . Financial motives are common. A few women see their husbands blocking the insurance payout that would allow them to start a new life; some kill to avoid being found to have misappropriated funds; some to hide the fact they've incurred household debt (the number of women who decide to kill

their husbands rather than confess to a shopping addiction has prompted the joke that *Snapped's* motto should be "Shop 'til he drops") (Kingston, 2008 p.71).

It is not clear why the show would continue to promote such an obviously inaccurate framework for understanding lethal female violence, but the show's paradoxical nature in promoting the idea of "snapping" while at the same time making evident the cunning and deviant nature of these women functions rhetorically to reconfirm two contradictory and archaic myths about women. The show plays on the myth of feminine evil, which will be further discussed in chapter four, and at the same time plays on female hysteria. The woman is so out of control that she has no power over her dangerous hormones but, somehow, is in control enough to plan and act out what is usually premeditated murder.

FEMALE HYSTERIA

Although the show's focus on lethal female violence may be new, the way the show is trying to depict its "snapped" women is not. The show's framing of the women's violence as motion is reminiscent of the Victorian stereotype of female hysteria. Women have long been portrayed as weak and hysterical, and this stereotype largely manifests from sexist ideas that were promoted as scientific fact in the 18th and 19th century. As Tuana (1993) asserts, "[a]lthough until the nineteenth century emphasis was upon the physical ailments to which women were prone because of their sexual organs, a connection between the uterus and madness had been established almost two millennia earlier" (p.95). Tuana bases her book, *The Less Noble Sex*, on the sexually biased ideas of women's inferiority that were promoted as truths in philosophy, medicine and religion.

Her work traces these ideas from classical Greece to the 19th century in a thematic approach that looks at five reoccurring arguments that stem from the idea that woman is an imperfect or “misbegotten man.” Although these sexist beliefs may have largely been abandoned by science, they are perpetuated in present day popular culture as is evident in *Snapped*.

One of the reoccurring arguments clearly present in the show is the idea of woman as hysterical. Women’s sexual organs were long thought to have crippled a woman’s control of her emotions. Their ability to reproduce was directly tied to their inability to maintain rationality. Tuana asserts “[w]omen’s reproductive cycles . . . were all times when she was subject to the nervous disorder labeled ‘reflexive insanity’, the nineteenth-century term for hysteria. Woman was a ‘victim of periodicity’ and thereby subject to a range of mental disturbances that had ‘neither homologue or analogue in man’” (p.101). In the reality of *Snapped*, all men are in danger since women’s inherent instability poses a threat. Their emotions overcome them and they “snap”. But women are not only burdened with sexual organs that make them hysterical, they also lack an innate sense of right and wrong: “[n]ormal femininity is defined as underdeveloped in comparison to masculinity. Woman is seen as more tied to the instinctual, the emotional, and the sexual. She is less capable of controlling her desires, and so must be controlled by man for her own good and for the good of society” (Tuana, 1993 p.92).

The scientific basis for these ideas may have died, but *Snapped* is visibly trying to resurrect them. Woman’s hysterical nature and hedonist ways can be seen in Sheila Davaloo, an Iranian woman charged with stabbing her husband to death while playing a “sex game.” Sheila handcuffed her husband and blindfolded him under the pretense of

“getting kinky,” and then stabbed him twice. She told him it was an accident and that she had lost the key to the handcuffs. He pleaded with her to call 911, but she refused. She later called for help, but she told him that the line was busy. Finally, after begging, Sheila released her husband and drove him to the hospital, but instead of taking him to the emergency room, she drove to a secluded parking lot and stabbed him once more. Both Davallo’s use of sexuality to lure her husband and the irrationality and violence of the crime play on archaic ideas of female morality and sexuality. Davallo emasculated her husband by making him beg her to save his life while giving him excuses that would seem insulting to anyone. The narrative surrounding the murder portrays Davallo’s actions as foolish and laughable. She made ludicrous excuses to her husband; she panicked when her first plan didn’t work, and her final act of taking him to a parking lot was when she was caught. Her murder is characterized as feminine in its irrationality and imprudence as opposed to the cunning, calculated and diabolic nature of male murders. Not only does her crime play on these myths but the way she lured her husband does as well.

And Davallo isn’t the only one portrayed as a femme fatal; the show describes the women as possessing physical characteristics that could attract future victims. For instance one woman was described as a “cute, sunny 22 year old,” another as “petite, pretty Nicki,” and “cute, blonde Lynda Taylor.” The narrator also discusses personal aspects of the women by saying such things as “she liked clothes: the sexier, the better” and “chatting as screen name iwanttobelaid.” These are all common ways the women are characterized as embodying pure sexuality. As Tuana states, “[a] woman uncontrolled was one of the greatest dangers to mankind” (p.255). Each of these women lured their

hapless victims to his death which further proves that “[r]emove the veneer of the loving woman who inspires man, and we find that danger of control gone awry through the power of woman’s insatiable lust. Woman is a source of inspiration for man, but she remains, even in her glory, a danger. Woman under the control is a help to man; woman out of control is his destruction” (p.86).

VIOLENCE AND PENTADIC ANALYSIS

When male violence is depicted, it is portrayed as action (in the Burkean sense) in which there was a cognizant choice involved in the crime. These choices can best be illuminated through the Burkean pentad. Pentadic analysis is used analyze human motives (Burke, 1976). Human behavior, when considered action, is seen as manifesting from a motive, and when discussing human action it is always attributed to a motive, rather than being an act without an emotional or mental catalyst. This is opposed to the reaction of a chemical that has only a physical catalyst. As Burke explains,

a physical scientist's relation to the materials involved in the study of motion differs in quality from his relation to his colleagues. He would never think of "petitioning" the objects of his experiment or "arguing with them," as he would with persons whom he asks to collaborate with him or to judge the results of his experiment. Implicit in these two relations is the distinction between the sheer motion of things and the actions of persons. (Burke, 1976 p.11)

In order to understand the motives of these behaviors one must use the pentad which is made up of five different terms that establish, according to Burke, the different elements inherent to human drama: (1) Scene: environment or context of the event, (2)

act: what is being accomplished/done (3) agent: entity performing the act, (4) agency: the way in which the act is able to be performed, and (5) purpose: goal of the act (Burke, 1978). Each of these can be paired to form a ratio which shows the way in which something is being characterized. For instance, if a student says that he or she was late due to car trouble that would fit into an agency-act ratio since it is the person's agency, represented by the broken down car, that stops the performance of the act (getting to school on time) which made him or her late. If that same student says he or she was late because of traffic that would fit into a scene-act ratio because the environment, instead of the student's agency, stopped the performance of the act which made the student late.

As was stated earlier, a crime is typically framed around a motive. The question of why the murder occurred is answered through a purpose/act ratio in which the reason behind the crime characterizes the act of the murder. Here the purpose or the motive is what caused the act of murder. As Rueckert asserts, “[a]ccording to the logic of the act purpose ratio, the kind of act...[is] largely controlled by the author's conscious purpose” (1963 p.76-7). When one is characterized in this ratio then one is bestowed with full selfhood since their actions have a purposeful motivation. Having selfhood and acting with purpose is part of what makes an individual a human being, giving them meaning and character. In other cases the focus is on the murderer himself. The question of why is then moved from the act to the agent, but the purpose as the focus still remains. Better understanding the agent is seen as a way of answering the question of why he would murder. This is demonstrated through a purpose/act ratio. In this classification the focus is not on the act of murder but on the murderer as the agent of the act. In *The Elements of Dramatism* (2001) Blakesley discusses the meaning of this particular ratio, stating that it

“...show[s] us how the agent is motivated by the purpose to act” (p.152). This shows clear cognition of the act and portrays the act as one that came from choice.

Another way in which murder can be characterized is through purpose/agent ratio. Portraying someone as acting within a purpose/agent ratio gives the person agency and justification. As Burke states, “A ‘purpose-agent ratio,’ would concern the logic of ‘means selecting,’ the relation of means to an end” (1989 p.136). By acting with purpose a person proves that he or she has the ability to exert power and make his or her own decisions. Regardless of which pentadic ratio frames the murder or whether the focus is on the act or agent, it is still characterized as purposeful.

"Snapping" deviates from a purposeful characterization. Instead showing a "snapped" woman's crime as akin to, in Burke's terms, "sleepwalking" (Burke,). These women are enacting a behavior that they are not conscious of. It is as though their gender forces them to act out a script of deviance they have no control over. The madness that their sexual organs and hormones have caused, as *Snapped* insinuates, strips them of choice, and it is choice that moralizes action. The foundation of morality is built upon choice. For instance, the act of kicking someone would traditionally be seen as action – one that has a negative connotation, but action nonetheless – but if the kick's catalyst derived from someone else hitting that person's knee and it jerked in response to that, then this would be seen as motion. The choice involved in the kick was not present and because of this, the person is not blamed or held responsible for the act. If the kick had occurred as action then the individual would be blamed for the act because he or she was acting on free will and made the decision to hurt someone by kicking them. It is choice that frames the act of kicking as well as all other acts that are considered action, but in

characterizing a woman as "snapping" her act is defined as motion and therefore lacking choice.

The idea of a woman "snapping" completely ignores her individual agency, instead characterizing her as having an inability to commit these crimes in any purposeful manner. The women of *Snapped* clearly lack individual agency if they can't even control their ability to be violent. They cannot impose their choices on the world around them since they lack control of their own sanity. *Snapped* creates a reality where lethal female violence cannot exist in either of the ratios mentioned earlier, even though it is clear that these actions do in fact have purpose. In choosing to characterize the story in such a contradictory manner, *Snapped* is able to reconfirm the long held notion that women are inherently unstable. These women, according to *Snapped's* ideas of lethal female violence, exist outside of traditional ideas of how and why violence exists. With no motive to explain the crime, society lacks a frame of reference to understand these crimes and - even more horrific - ways to prevent them. If women will "snap" at any moment, how is society to protect itself from such villains?

While framing the murders as motion confirms female hysteria and the inherent instability of women, it also undermines the show's denigration of these women. Just as a person whose knee jerks when hit was not responsible for the act, these "snapped" women cannot be held morally responsible for their crimes. If it is *Snapped's* goal to punish these women, then letting them off the hook for murder by portraying their actions as snapping would not be in the show's best interest. It is not enough for the show to only reconfirm female hysteria and let these women be seen as mentally ill individuals. This explains the show's paradoxical nature. Using "snapping" as a rhetorical strategy relieves

the women of the culpability involved in the crime, but using the myth of feminine evil revives the blame and responsibility for the crime that is lost in portraying the murder as motion. Rhetorically moving between action and motion to characterize the same behavior further reconfirms these two notions. The crime was demanded of the woman because of her physicality, but yet the murder is still her fault. She isn't at fault because she is a woman, yet she is at fault for this exact same reason.

The "snapping" that occurs on the show then becomes not a break with sanity but a break with goodness. It is as though the woman's inherent evil has been released like a poison slowly infecting her body. Rather than being a "sleep walker" or a knee jerker, she is a possessed individual who has chosen to let her inherently evil nature take over. It becomes not her crime that she receives blame for, but her act of "snapping" because in doing so she committed the ultimate of crimes: a transgression of her gender. The morality and goodness expected - or rather, demanded - of a woman has been rejected by the "snapped" woman.

FEMALE MURDERERS AND SUBJECTIVITY

Framing lethal female violence as existing outside of rationality and individual agency is not a portrayal only used by *Snapped*. Most lethal female violence when confronted by the media and the legal system is depicted in this same manner. In *When Women Kill: Questions of Agency and Subjectivity* (2003) Belinda Morrissey argues that the way in which narratives surrounding lethal female violence are constructed destroys the agency that might be recognized in the act of murder. Morrissey examines the diverse ways female murderers' agency is stripped from them, arguing that society is able to

accept these unthinkable crimes “as viable only when their agency is completely denied” (p.28). Society sees women as givers of life, so the idea of a woman taking life away is a horrifying concept. It is difficult to rectify the idea of a passive, submissive and maternal figure as violent. It is also difficult to imagine a figure that is seen as passive acting as an autonomous and free individual, or in other words enacting subjectivity. Morrissey (2003) asserts that to mend this dissonance both the media and legal system succeed in creating simplified characterizations of women that reestablish male power and further ideas of female passivity. This occurs in three different ways: women are vilified and portrayed as monsters, their stories become distanced from reality and transcend into the world of “Mythification,” or they are treated as victims. Because of *Snapped*’s small number of abuse narratives – as stated earlier, none were present in the show’s most recent season – the first two classifications will be most beneficial for this thesis.

Snapped’s individual narratives center on the murdereress’s break with sanity. The show points to the catalyst as mental illness to understand these women’s actions. Even though similar actions by men can be seen as ruthless, horrific or cold-blooded, women’s actions must have a pathology attached to them. In continuing these unchangeable narratives, Morrissey contends the actors in them are constructed as irrational and, therefore, unaccountable for their actions. They are victims of their own faulty minds. As Morrissey asserts, “[t]he narratives one tells and those told about one are integral factors in the production of subjectivity” (p.7). Even though most of the women never actually “snap,” the premise of *Snapped*’s overarching narrative has potency. Regina Graycar asserts that “[t]here are enormous obstacles to women’s stories occupying the same space and having the same authority as the stock stories that

underpin the common sense of deeply gendered legal discourse’” (as cited in Morrissey, 2003 p.13). *Snapped* gives space for the taboo crimes of these women but, in doing so, creates a narrative that undercuts the women’s ability to murder. There is an allure of using women who have snapped because it defies the myth of female passivity, but only to a certain extent. While a female murderer in no way conforms to gender ideals, based on the reality *Snapped* creates women only become murderers when they "snap" out of consciousness. The idea of women only being violent when they are out of control of their actions both challenges and reconfirms the notions of female passivity. The lack of violence that is required for passivity is obviously violated when a woman murders a loved one, but when this act occurs the woman is not fully herself. She is therefore both violent by the act she has committed and passive in the fact that it was not truly her who committed it. Once again, *Snapped* has complicated notions of lethal female violence by recognizing its existence, but doing so within a sexist framework. Allison Young states that “the subject [or society] experiences the event of a crime as a wound; a wound that must be touched, picked at, shuddered over and eventually sutured” (as cited in Morrissey, 2003 p.11). "*snapped*" women represent societal wounds because they are difficult for society to understand and cope with. Morrissey uses this rationale in order to argue that the characterizations that were outlined earlier are society’s method of understanding lethal female violence.

Vilification and “monsterization” are the most common ways lethal female violence is understood when overt abuse is not involved. In this characterization, the woman is denied individual agency by the media focusing on her evil, and therefore inhuman, nature. The focus on a woman’s inhuman qualities helps to create distance

between society and the murderer. By doing this, “[v]ilification operates to displace the offender from her society, to insist on her otherness, thereby avoiding the knowledge that she is produced by that society” (Morrissey p.24). This is also evident in *Snapped* since there originally was a connection made between the audience and the "snapped" woman which is then divorced when the woman murders. Constructing the woman's crimes in a different narrative may enable the audience to sympathize and understand the woman or just let the audience see her for what she is: a woman capable of enacting murder not because of mental illness or an inherent wickedness, but because she has the ability to do so. However, *Snapped*, although letting audience members identify with the woman in the beginning, later creates the woman to be such a monster that audience members would want to push the women as far from society, and themselves, as possible. The focus on otherness and not her ability as a murderer creates a denial of individual agency. “The agency denial which takes place . . . is specifically that of *human* agency. The murderess is considered to have acted, but not as a human woman” (Morrissey p.25).

In season six, the audience meets Lynn Turner a woman, who murdered two different men of uniform – a police officer and fire fighter – in order to collect on their life insurance. She was portrayed as a heartless and conniving woman who didn't fit into the ideal of a controlled and passive woman. She was described as “flashy,” a “popular fixture at police bars,” while her “late night antics were legendary on the force.” A friend of Lynn's first husband remembers a very telling event in which he and many other people were at a party and in another room saw the shadow of a “shapely figure” that was pointing two guns. When the shadow stepped into the light it was revealed to be Lynn Turner. The narrator then states in an ominous tone that Lynn carried a concealed

weapon, though it wouldn't be a gun she would use to kill. Lynn was known for dating a "string of different police officers" and for sleeping "around with other people on the force," but when she met Glenn Turner that all changed, or at least temporarily.

The two dated for a while and eventually got married. Glenn's fellow officers had heard rumors about Lynn's infidelities and had advised him not marry her. One officer stated that they "were placing bets the day of the wedding" as to when there would be a divorce. The couple started running into money trouble because of what Glenn's father described as "champagne taste on a beer budget." Glenn started working a second job on the weekends and "worked 365 days without a break" while Lynn partied with friends. Lynn was described as dominating, especially when it came to forcing Glenn to change his life insurance policy so that she could be the beneficiary. As Glenn's mother described it, "it was like she was breathing down his back forcing him to change his policy." Glenn was bankrolling her lifestyle, and Lynn was shown to be unappreciative and disloyal. Rumors had circulated that she was sleeping with another man in a different town.

Lynn represents everything a woman is not supposed to be. She dominates her husband and represents masculinity in the relationship. Her husband is being made a fool by her actions, and as he works tirelessly to give her the life she demands Lynn is sleeping with another man. Glenn, on the other hand, is represented as more feminine. While Lynn was "controlling" and "expected him to jump when she called," Glenn was nicknamed "Buddha" and described as a trusting guy and a great friend. The show creates a clear antithesis between Lynn and her husband in order to make his victimization that much more appalling and for her actions to seem that much more

monstrous. She is depicted as adulterous, vicious, hedonistic, wild and – what the audience comes to later find out – dangerous. Soon after Glenn had changed his life insurance policy he started feeling sick, which the doctor diagnosed as a 24 hour bug. But lucky for Glenn, as the narrator states, “surprisingly Lynn made time to play nurse.” Once again, Lynn is portrayed as not traditionally feminine in the fact that she would not be considered caring or loving, especially since Lynn is “playing” nurse not actually nursing or taking care of her husband. By the next morning her husband is found dead and the autopsy finds the cause of death to be an enlarged heart. Glenn’s family and friends were left devastated by his death and wary of the true cause. This time around, though, Lynn didn’t play the traditional feminine role of a grieving widow. Four days after her husband’s death she moved in with Randy Thompson, the fire fighter she had been rumored to be seeing in the next town over. She told him she was divorced not widowed, so he was unaware of her suspicious past.

After a few years of living together and having a child together, the couple separated and continued an on-again, off-again relationship. Finally, after they had separated Randy moved out, but Lynn wanted to give it one last try. She invited him to dinner to try and rekindle their flame. After dinner, Lynn invited him “back to her place for desert,” once again associating her deadly actions with her sexuality. Randy woke up with the same flu-like symptoms that Lynn’s deceased husband had had and died a day later, and, just like in the case of her deceased husband, Lynn collected on Randy’s insurance too. When Glenn’s family got wind of the Randy’s death they immediately wanted an investigation. It was discovered that Lynn had poisoned both Glenn and Randy with anti-freeze. Ethyl-glycol is one of the main ingredients in anti-freeze and it has a

sweet taste that can be hidden in desserts, Jell-O, and many other items that she fed to both of the men. The ingredient causes flu-like symptoms and is difficult to detect unless the liver is checked. The police also found out that a few days before Glenn's death Lynn had called a local animal shelter to ask about the effects of ingesting anti-freeze. Clearly, Lynn's crime was not of a woman "snapping" but of someone tricking men into their deaths. Both crimes had a clear purpose of collecting life insurance, and her first crime was so carefully planned that she may have gotten away with it. It was her greed that was her ultimate down fall. Although agency can be recognized in her act, the narrative of Lynn Turner is not that of human but of a monster. In every way she defied what it meant to be human. She preyed on the men who protected society and killed both a loving husband and the father of her child. These are all sacred figures within society. The agency she gains – as Morrissey states – is not human agency. The ending of her story is so outrageous and so horrifying that no one can identify with her to even see her human qualities. Even though her purpose was clearly a financial one, her crimes seem too large for such a mundane motive, especially since the total amount of money she collected on was \$276,000.

The vilification of Lynn Turner is common of most of the women on *Snapped*. "*snapped*" women are specifically chosen because of the sensational aspects of their crimes. The show vilifies these women in every way possible by using friends to describe their unruly ways, such as a friend of Lynn talking about how she partied all the time, constantly had money, and slept around. The show normally characterizes the victim as kind, generous and trusting such as Lynn's husband being nicknamed "Buddha." They also further degrade the "snapped" woman's personality by having other individuals –

usually friends or family of the victim or people in the town – talk about other negative aspects of the woman’s personality such as her spending habits, how she controlled or degraded her husband, how she was uncaring, her sexual activities, and her use of her sexuality. All of these aspects create a dreadful picture of a woman not fulfilling gender ideals. In fact, these women, at least according to *Snapped*, use their gender as their weapon. For a select few women, vilification can morph into mythification because of similarities of the women’s actions, narrative or characteristics with those women who are mythologized as evil. According to Morrissey, mythification leads to the women’s actions being characterized as those of characters in stories, distant from the society of normal humans, as opposed to those of typical contemporary women. They represent something closer to a mythical woman than a real one. Carolyn Warmus, the daughter of a self-made millionaire, is one of *Snapped*’s mythic characters; though the myth she represents is not an ancient one, but rather one that has recently entered the American consciousness. It is her resonance with the famous film *Fatal Attraction* that moves her story into the realm of myth. The narrator describes her as a “young temptress,” whose “blond hair, a voluptuous figure, and sassy personality, got what Carolyn wanted, including men.” When she started working at an elementary school, she was instantly attracted to Paul Soloman, a married man who was a fifth grade teacher at the school she taught at, and even though he was unattainable, as *Snapped* insinuates, she refused to accept this.

This parallels the movie in which Michael Douglas's character has an affair with a colleague played by Glenn Close. After the affair Close's character wants to continue the relationship but Douglas refuses. After Carolyn's affair with Paul Solomon no longer

satisfied her appetite, she demanded more, and when her lover couldn't give her what she wanted, she took it for herself by murdering his wife. In the movie, Close's character harasses him constantly, threatening him and stalking him. Near the end of the movie, Close's character kidnaps Douglas's daughter from school and takes her to an amusement park, buying her ice cream as well as taking her on a roller coaster. This also parallels the Warmus case, though with a slight variation, since she lavished Paul's daughter with gifts and became very close to her. Carolyn was able to carry on a relationship that Close's character was not able to.

Although *Fatal Attraction* ends with Douglas's wife killing Close and Warmus's story ends with Warmus killing Solomon's wife, there is still an obvious parallel. The stories may end differently but the connection is clear: Warmus's story is *Fatal Attraction* gone wrong, horrifically wrong when you consider the way in which the crime was executed. Carolyn had invited Paul to meet her at a motel. While Paul was waiting for her, she went to his house to kill his wife who was now alone in the house (the daughter was on a ski trip). After killing Paul's wife, Carolyn arrived a half an hour late to their rendezvous in order to create an alibi for her crime and guarantee that Paul's wife was alone. Only hours after killing his wife, Carolyn was able to have sex, showing how depraved and disconnected from society she truly was. Indicted as the aggressor of the relationship by *Snapped*, Carolyn is characterized as a classic femme fatale. Her iniquity is beyond the norm. Sex, desire, possession and death weave a tangled and dangerous web in her story. Her upper class status, beauty and ability to use her sexuality, which *Snapped* constantly connects back to her act of murder, all give her the components of someone who would be considered to be above society. *Snapped*'s producers were not

the only ones attracted by Carolyn's story: two television movies - *The Danger of Love: The Carolyn Warmus Story* and *A Murderous Affair: The Carolyn Warmus Story* – were made about her crimes, and her case was profiled on the Investigation Discovery program *Deadly Women*. The episode was entitled "Femme Fatale." Her story is also included in the book *The Mammoth Book of Famous Trials: The 30 Greatest Trials of All time, Including Charles Manson, Oscar Wilde, O.J. Simpson and Al Capone* (Wikes, 2006) and *Lovers of deceit : Carolyn Warmus and the "Fatal Attraction" murder* (Gallagher, 1993). An article that makes evident her connection to the story is entitled: "Death Imitates Art as Police Charge Teacher Carolyn Warmus with a *Fatal Attraction* Killing" (Brower, 1990). Carolyn's story is one where the ending, rather than resolving the societal and gender deviance of its villain, creates a story where the audience fears the horror this woman represents. Although mythification occurs for only a few women on *Snapped*, the show exploits this technique for many of the women in smaller ways. Mythification occurs on a narrative level but it can also occur visually as well. Many of the women's pictures, as was discussed in chapter one, are captured when they are yelling, angry or making devious expressions. Many of the women have wide eyes, open mouths and wild hair, which connects them with the image of Medusa. In the book *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation* (1994), Birch writes about the symbolic power of a photograph a notorious female criminal, stating that

[L]ike the image of the Medusa, this photograph has acquired the attributes of myth, the stony gaze of Britain's longest-serving woman prisoner striking terror, mirrored with fascination, in those who look upon it. At once atavistic – drawing its power from potent symbols of wicked women from the Medusa to seventeenth

century witches – and portentous – and what kind of acts might women be capable of? – that image has become symbolic of the threat of femininity unleashed from its traditional bonds of tenderness, goodness, nurturance. It strikes at the heart of our fears about unruly women, about criminality and about the way gender is constructed (p.32).

These types of images have equal power to mythologized narratives that connect these women to the potency and dangerousness of Medusa.

When behavior is vilified or mythologized, it cannot be placed inside the pentadic ratios because it is not understood as action, and therefore, not seen as purposeful. Their motivations are not those of the average individual; instead, they represent the desires of a dark and perverted component of society. Society, as Morrissey asserts, chooses not to recognize these women as a part of the symbolic order because in doing so it would need to recognize the consubstantiality it has with these women and the partial responsibility society has for creating these women. In order to dissociate societal connection with these "snapped" women their individual agency is stolen. This is evident through the Burkean pentad because the women are not characterized in a purpose/act or purpose/agent ratio as male violence commonly is.

By creating these "snapped" women into monsters the media furthers the idea of these women's actions being within the realm of motion. As Crable asserts of Burke, "[h]e identifies the condition that makes possible the separation of 'mind' from 'body'-the polarity that lies beneath all distinctions between the 'natural' and 'social'" (2003 p.125). Like monsters, these women's malevolence lies beneath their exterior and cannot be controlled or predicted. These women are not recognized as socialized beings because

of their animalistic ways. By seeing them as monstrous and as unable to control themselves they are stripped of their humanity; these women are more connected to the wildness of nature than the civility of humanity.

CHAPTER FOUR: FRAMING THE MYTH OF FEMININE EVIL

As was discussed in the last chapter, *Snapped* highlights two contradictory and archaic myths both through its general framing of lethal female violence as well as its portrayals of each woman's actions. Female hysteria was the first myth that was outlined in the earlier chapter, but, as of yet, the myth of feminine evil has only been briefly discussed. On *Snapped* each woman's individual narrative reconfirms the myth of feminine evil by the show's emphasis on the woman's ability to lure her innocent victim and then brutally murder him. Showcasing the most heinous versions of lethal female violence as well as presenting the woman's narrative in a manner that is heavily one-sided towards her guilt, proves the evil that exists in these "snapped" women. The fact that all the women on the show seem sane and ordinary before they enact their crimes then points to not just "snapped" women being evil but all women as possibly capable of such crimes. The tragedy that befell these men at the hands of these "snapped" women is reminiscent of narratives that are much older and more famous than those of the women on *Snapped*.

Greek mythology and biblical writings often depict female characters as treacherous and evil. Deceit and distraction are characteristics that have long been attached to the feminine, and women are seen as seductresses with homicidal intents. In many stories it is the woman, and her inherently evil nature, that causes the death or downfall of a male character. According to Ria Kloppenborg (1995), author of *Female*

Stereotypes in Religious Traditions, “A woman’s physical beauty and alluring personality were portrayed as evil temptations to men . . . The woman acknowledges her inherent feminine evil, offering her obedient submission as penance, thus allowing her husband to partake of the pleasure she has to offer, so long as he dictates the terms” (pp. 158-159). In order to explain the societal implications of the myth's presence on *Snapped*, this chapter must first address the history of the myth as well as its potency in popular culture. This chapter will then discuss the various visual and narrative components of the show that reassert the myth’s veracity.

HISTORY BEHIND THE MYTH

As was stated in earlier, in Greek mythology the first woman created was Pandora, whom Zeus produced for the sole purpose of torturing and punishing mankind. Christianity’s version of Pandora manifested in the form of Eve who doomed mankind to pain and suffering for her lack of restraint. While it is easy to see such stories as archaic and irrelevant to current societal interactions, they have a profoundly lasting effect: “The fact is, however, that the myth [of the fall] has projected a malignant image of the male-female relationship and the ‘nature’ of women that is still deeply embedded in the modern psyche” (Daly, 1973 45). As Hays, author of *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil*, states, “the fall of man should rightly be called the fall of woman because once more the second sex is blamed for all the trouble in the world” (1964 p.81). Because of the fall women are believed to have inherited sin from their biblical mother. As St. Augustine wrote “[w]hat is the difference whether it is in a wife or in a mother, it

is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any other woman” (as cited in Jerome, 1965 p.204).

The myth of feminine evil is based on the idea of a dormant evil that is thought to exist in every woman. Working as evidence to prove the danger women posed, the myth of Eve and feminine evil has become one of the strongest weapons in patriarchy’s arsenal. As Nel Noddings asserts in her book *Women and Evil* (1989), “Women serve as scapegoats for the evil men fear in themselves. Understandably, precautions would have to be taken against that evil (and women) at a time when human understanding was primitive. The scapegoat syndrome is seen again and again and is certainly seen in the myth of Adam and Eve” (p. 37).

The myth of Adam and Eve is so pervasive not only because of the role it symbolizes for women but its historical implications. Eve is one of the only female figures in the Bible, and Eve’s inversion – Mary – while pure and virtuous, is not a figure that offers women much salvation either. Mary is representative of passive obedience and plays the role of sperm vessel. Though she has more visibility than Eve and is praised for her role, as Plain and Sellers (2007) state “Mary is apparently glorified but only in return for her role as servant of God” (p.90). These two hopeless roles that women are offered – impossible purity and horrendous evil – were not always the only roles women were given. As Nodding states

In casting woman and serpent as evildoers, Judaic writers overturned a powerful earlier tradition which associated both with wisdom and fertility. In the ancient goddess religions, snakes were the special companions of women, symbols of sexuality, linked through the shedding of their skins - which was seen as a form of

rebirth - with women's creative and reproductive powers....Appalled by this pagan tradition, the authors of Genesis converted the sensual, fertile goddess into a shameful sinner. They covered her nakedness with an apron of fig leaves, and punished her sexuality with pain and oppression: "*In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee*" . . . Projecting all guilt upon women, branding them as lustful allies of the Devil who wean men from God and lead them from the path of virtue, the Genesis story enshrines the myth of feminine evil as a justification for female oppression. (1989 p.53 emphasis in original)

Many scholars have written on the potency of the myth, arguing that subordination and demonization of the woman's role in religion permits society to project guilt onto women for their sexuality. As Caputi asserts "Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Karen Horney, Kate Millett, Mary Daly and many others have pointed out, the myth of Adam and Eve ordains the ontological blame be affixed to the primordial mother/female figure. Moreover, the myth of the Fall, not only framed Eve, but also set into motion a pervasive myth of 'feminine evil', particularly female *sexual* evil" (1987 p.144). This myth creates a prejudice against women that reinforces itself by compelling both men and women to see female behavior through the framework of feminine evil. Daly argues that "the myth [of the fall] takes on cosmic proportions since the male viewpoint is metamorphosed into God's viewpoint. It amounts to a cosmic false naming. It misnames the mystery of evil, casting it into the distorted mold of the myth of feminine evil" (Daly, 1973, p. 47). The biblical link makes women's connection to evil seem like a largely unconscious and

inherent force, so rather than seeing actions as individual to each woman, they are seen as part of a larger network of evil.

Many scholars such as those already listed state that not only does the myth allow for prejudice, but for a physical manifestation of hate. This view, scholars argue, is evident in domestic violence and rape, but is most historically visible in the European witch craze. During this period “although exact numbers are unknown, researchers estimate that from two hundred thousand to ten million women were brutally tortured and killed as heretics and witches” (Wilson, 2005 p.318). Women were tortured, raped and molested and murdered with little proof of any wrong doing. But was any proof really necessary? After all, the proof was within the woman herself; lurking behind her kind eyes and soft flesh was a monster that needed to be destroyed. As Noddings (1991) asserts “the persecutors also held that women were more sensitive to the supernatural; this sensitivity coupled with materiality and sensuality made it more likely that women more than men would receive and entertain devils and demons” (p. 45). Women's innate sensitivity to the supernatural could also be construed as an ability to speak with higher powers of good as opposed to evil, but there is one caveat to a woman's sensitivity: it is undermined by her lack of a moral compass. While a woman could communicate with all supernatural beings, under the persecutors' line of reasoning, her moral defect left her prey to only the worst of them. Daly, Ehrenreich and English have all argued that the witch craze manifested from the threat that women posed to patriarchy as midwives and as healers since at the time there was a rise in scientific medicine, which was a completely male dominated field.

The end of the witch craze did not mean an end to an organized assault on women because of their perceived evil. Instead of mass slaughter, new tactics were devised to further perpetuate the myth and strengthen its appeal. What religion had held as fact for years was now being incorporated into other areas: “At the opening of the [nineteenth] century, biology and medicine set out to prove that nature had given *all* women a basic instinct that made them into predators, destroyers, witches – evil sisters” (Dijkstra, 1996 p.3). Dijkstra asserts that it was not only scientists and psychologists who were able to perpetuate the myth of feminine evil, many artists and writers disseminated the myth in various forms as well: “the late nineteenth century . . . moves from images of the woman as a ‘flower of evil’ (Baudelaire), a companion of fauns, a cat, a snake, a viper, a serpent and a cobra who is sexually excited by animals (Darwin), and dangerously seductive as a prostitute (Zola) to the woman who has the power to decapitate a man (Flaubert, Mallarme, Moreau, Wilde)” (as cited in Gilbert, 2006 p. 80). The myth’s progression from religion to science and medicine was only one part of its journey. Its strength is in its ability to reinvent itself from religious story to scientific fact to accepted truth of popular culture – the last of the myth’s mutations. The myth of feminine evil has now extended beyond Eve and Pandora to encompass such images as the vamp and the femme fatale that are prominent, in one form or another, on our television and movie screens: “when toward mid-century, in the aftermath of World War II, the biologists finally got around to discarding some of their own formally ‘incontrovertible truths’ the media had already turned those mistakes into cultural commonplaces – into ‘natural laws’ of the entertainment industry” (Dijksrta, 1996 p.5).

SNAPPED AND FEMININE EVIL

The premise of *Snapped* relies on the myth of feminine evil since the show works to categorize lethal female violence as having only one catalyst: "snapping".

Understanding lethal female violence in a way that allows for only one cause moves the motive of the murder from a cognitive domain, in which a crime would be carried out in a rational manner, to a physical domain, in which the body of the woman forces her to "snap". It was not the woman's cold and calculating manner that permitted her to carry out the crime but rather her sexual organs and hormones that demanded such an action. One might be surprised to see that *Snapped* even elicits shock from the audience when considering the existence of the myth of feminine evil. What could possibly be so astonishing about female murderers "snapping" if they were already expected to enact such crimes? Though women were thought to be dangerous, there was a cure for their horrible fate: domesticity. A woman could prevent, or at least try to mitigate, the symptoms of her disease by "...accept[ing] the proper feminine role...and [by] hav[ing] regular intercourse with her husband" (Tuana, 1993 p. 96). By keeping women in a submissive role they would pose less of a "threat" to man. As Tuanna asserts "The Greeks believed that the animal passions inherent in woman's nature could be best tamed through marriage. A proper union would domesticate woman by ensuring that her passions were properly controlled and directed towards the welfare of her family" (1993 p.156). The myth of feminine evil proved that women needed to be subordinated in such positions and that male dominance over women was divinely ordained.

Whether the writers intend to promote the myth of feminine evil is unclear, but the promotion of this myth has implications beyond the show. This myth poses two possible effects for society and women. First, if these women showed no incriminating signs before they murdered, then it further proves that the myth of feminine evil truly does exist. None of these women possessed devious traits that would set them apart from any other women – except the crimes they commit – which suggests the question: how do we know who will “snap” and who won’t? Second, the women on the show undermine the current social order by showing the weaknesses of institutions set up to protect men from the dangers of women. *Snapped* undermines the power of the constraints that have been created for women by showing deviant women who, before committing their crimes, lived “normal” lives; many had husbands and children but ultimately were unhappy and acted out in order to get their way. The myth of feminine evil manifests in the show through portrayals of women as vamps who are able to lure their victims in while hiding their devious nature and by creating a very clear binary between the “snapped” woman and victim.

Woman's subordinate nature in the eyes of man as well as man's superior moral character could make the potential dangers of feminine evil seem harmless, but the true face of evil never shows itself on a woman. Lurking behind the “sugar, spice and everything nice” facade of a woman was “a raving, predatory beast, a creature who preyed on men out of sheer sadistic self indulgence” (Dijkstra, 1986 p. 234). She is able to deceive a man, lulling him into thinking he is safe, but she is also able to use her sexuality to trick man against his better judgment. Female sexuality has long been characterized as a potent force that leaves men unable to think rationally. Men are left

vulnerable to the irresistible temptations of the feminine flesh. In her book, *The monstrous-feminine: film, feminism, psychoanalysis*, Creed asserts “She may appear pure and beautiful on the outside but evil may, nevertheless, reside within. It is this stereotype of feminine evil – beautiful on the outside/corrupt within – that is so popular within patriarchal discourses about women’s evil nature. This dichotomous view of women is central to the representation of female killers in the vampire film and other horror texts such as *Cat People*, *Repulsion*, *Sisters* and *Fatal Attraction*” (Creed, 1993 p.86). The deceitfulness that is a component of the myth of feminine evil is also present in "snapped" women. Each of the women is portrayed as luring her hapless victim in as he is completely unaware of her true intentions.

The show alludes to this issue in its visual highlighting of the woman's ability to hide her evil nature. One of the most common forms of evidence the show uses is photographs. The show uses footage and pictures taken from the crime scene, interrogation and the court room and uses freeze frames or unflattering images which create an image of wickedness. For instance, the show will stop on the frame of footage in which the woman looks like she is yelling or angry. The show also stops on images in which the woman is at the midpoint of blinking to create a picture in which the woman appears deranged. It is as though these photos are able to capture what is beneath the surface, slowly bubbling up. These pictures become further proof of the woman's evil nature because they are captured at times when the woman is unaware of the photo being taken or because she cannot always contain the visibility of her true evil. These images work to highlight the insanity of these women and the danger they pose. The show’s usage of photographs and footage that it did not produce itself further proves that these

images show the women's true nature since the show could not have produced images that would further backup its claim. Using material that the show did not produce furthers the objective ethos of *Snapped*.

The evil connotation of the photo as well as the fear it produces is further strengthened by playing menacing music while slowly tightening the shot of the woman's eyes. The "snapped" women, while having diverse faces, all seem to have an expression that lacks human qualities. They look alien, disconnected from the humans they might have once been. Usually such photos are of the women after they have been arrested or while they are on trial. The close up on the photo is held for what seems to be an uncomfortably long time, forcing the audience to glare at the evil present within the woman and highlighting her fatal nature. The women seem drained, exhausted, lost and detached, which could be symptomatic of the daunting future they face, but these pictures combined with music and tightening on the woman's eyes can make such expressions seem monstrous.

The extreme close up is a very common shot in cinema, especially of the "femme fatale". Summarizing the importance of the close-up, Donae states "that the face is that bodily part not accessible to the subject's own gaze (or only accessible as a virtual image in a mirror) – hence its over representation as *the* instance of subjectivity. But the face is not taken in at a glance – it already problematizes the notion of a pure surface since it points to an interior, a depth. The face is the most *readable* space of the body" (1991 p.47). Audiences are forced to read that these photos show the underlying evil that is present in these women. The close up works to reconfirm the evil nature of the woman that is highlighted both in the narrative of the woman and interviews about personality

and crime. Her eyes make evident the evil that was bubbling up inside her before she snapped.

Snapped also relies on personal photos of the woman, though these photos are utilized to highlight the woman's promiscuity, rather than her iniquity. Traditionally the photos are of the woman making sexual expressions or wearing sexy clothing, which shows her sexual and predatory nature. The woman's excess of sexuality and sexual agency is depicted by the show as evil because it connects the woman's use of sexuality to her ability to attract her mate. The photos that the show uses are usually framed so that the audience can only see the woman's shoulders and head, but when the woman's sexual nature is being highlighted this changes. If a woman is wearing a top or dress that shows cleavage, the shot will start from the bottom of her chest and move to her head, making sure to include the cleavage even if the picture has to be shot at a very far distance. Many times while visually highlighting the cleavage they also verbally make note of it. A friend or family member will be discussing the woman's inappropriate ways of dressing while a photo of her cleavage is being shown. If cleavage isn't available for the show to use, the camera turns to other areas of skin that may be exposed. For instance, Mary Ellen Samuels, who will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter, wore a dress which had black lace on both sides exposing her legs. The camera slowly tightens on her leg as the narrator states "she liked clothes, the sexier the better." Many of the photos, whether used to highlight the woman's evilness or sexuality, are taken well before the murder happens, showing that something had long been lurking under that attractive façade. These photos and videos, combined with their presentation and background music, show women whose wickedness went long undetected by those around her, and was the least

noticed by the man she ended up killing. Though other parts of the show unwittingly undermine the idea of "snapping," the visual nature of the show clearly plays into this notion by trying to expose what no one else really saw coming.

While the photos work to create a diabolical woman, the binary *Snapped* constructs between the victim and snapped killer creates a heartless woman. Almost every *Snapped* narrative includes a man who falls madly in love with the wrong woman. The man almost always represents idealized versions of traditional masculinity. The man wants to be a good father and husband; he only thinks of taking care of his family and significant other. Many of the men supported their significant others financially and emotionally and worked to make the women in their lives happy. The man and woman are cast in polar opposite roles, with the man representing a selfless and devoted lover who didn't deserve the unjustified crime that led to his demise. The dichotomous nature of the two main characters in the show's narrative further highlights just how evil the "snapped" woman really is. The woman is already understood as evil purely because of the murder she has committed, but she becomes that much more evil for killing such an innocent man. It is the male's characterization that heightens the horrendousness of the woman's crime.

Shawn Washington is a clear example of the typical *Snapped* victim. Shawn met Adrienne Hickson while they were in college together and fell madly in love even though they seemed to be a mismatched pair. Adrienne came from a very wealthy family while Shawn came from a poor single parent family. The differences didn't seem to bother the couple, and when Adrienne decided to move to Atlanta, Georgia to prepare for the LSATs, Shawn moved with her. He selflessly gave up school and took on two jobs in

order for Adrienne to solely focus on studying and taking paralegal courses. When Adrienne was accepted to Howard Law School, Shawn decided to stay behind, and they both agreed to carry on a long distance relationship. Shawn would pay to fly her back to Atlanta two times a month. As his father stated "He was always there to buy her things. He catered to her."

And Adrienne was used to this kind of behavior from the men in her life. Earlier in the episode, the audience is told that Adrienne, the youngest of three, was "seen as a princess." Her friend states that "she was a shopaholic" and the narrator states that "Daddy always covered the bill." For Shawn, covering the costs of plane tickets was part of performing his role as the care taker of Adrienne. Shawn wanted to be the opposite of his absentee father, and only really cared about being a parent and husband, and taking care of Adrienne was part reaching that goal. This is a classic binary that the show sets up between victim and "snapped" woman. The woman represents a break in traditional femininity, whether it is her sexual aggressiveness, greed, lack of selflessness or career ambitions, whereas the male represents a very traditional role, though at times a somewhat feminine role as well. The men are usually blind to what everyone else can plainly see. The male character is masculine in his ability and desire to provide but naïve in his lack of ability to see beyond the woman's façade. The opposition of weak or naïve male against a conniving female heightens the "snapped" woman's potency and power. The woman is able to trick him, to lure him in with her appeal and suck him dry like the succubus she truly is.

But the binary created in *Snapped* is undermined with information that is revealed at trial. It turns out that Shawn was able to afford to fly Adrienne from law school, not on

the money Shawn earned from his two blue collar jobs, but from the money he was making dealing drugs. At the time of his death, Shawn had two drug charges pending, and during trial a friend of his, who was to be a witness for the prosecution, was murdered in a drug deal gone wrong. This is not mentioned at all during the earlier part of the show and none of his friends, whose interviews were used throughout the show, commented or even alluded to the issue. In fact, if it had not been for the defense attorney bringing it up at trial, Shawn's squeaky clean image may not have been smudged with the stain of being a drug dealer, but this is only part of the accusation made during the trial that could ruin Shawn's image. Adrienne's defense attorney paints a different picture of Shawn, one in which he is a violent drug dealer who threatened Adrienne. *Snapped*, though, undermines this discrepancy in Shawn's image by challenging Adrienne's claims of self defense. The show interviews only friends who deny this claim and attest to kind treatment of Adrienne. By deflating claims of Shawn's extracurricular activities, *Snapped* bolsters Adrienne's image as the true evil doer. *Snapped* creates a very black and white picture of the murders in which the show.

Adrienne, who had stabbed Shawn, claimed that in the heat of an argument he threatened her; and she picked up a knife and stabbed him in order to fend for her life. She claimed that there were other times in the relationship in which he had choked her, and she feared he may kill her, but *Snapped* ignores even the possibility of this claim being true. Before the self defense claim is brought up, the audience is introduced to it through the frame work of an attack. Before the show goes to a commercial break the narrator states "Next, Adrienne attacks him again, but this time from the witness stand," then the audience sees a clip of Adrienne describing what it feels like to be choked. The

use of “attacking” challenges Adrienne’s claims, showing that not only was Adrienne lying about defending herself, but that she was trying to hurt Shawn’s reputation after he was dead, further alluding to how evil Adrienne truly is. This undermines her claim and doesn't give it equal weight with the defense's theory of a crime of passion. The show undercuts even the possibility of domestic violence even though Shawn's drug charges, his previous violent behavior and Adrienne's claims of self defense point to the chance of this being at least plausible. In the world of *Snapped*, self defense is only a claim women make in order to gain sympathy from a jury.

Adrienne’s case is very representative of most *Snapped* episodes, but one factor that was missing was an indictment of her sexuality. Though she was convicted for having a silver spoon in her mouth, she was not criticized for her promiscuity, which is common on *Snapped*. One episode that would represent *Snapped*'s focus on promiscuity would be that of Mary Ellen Samuels. She, like Adrienne, fell in love with a man who was characterized as innocent and selfless. He was described as "a hard working guy" who was devoted to Mary Ellen and her daughter from a previous marriage. Though he worked in the movie industry, he made a modest, but solid income and was described as being turned off by the flashiness of the industry. Mary Ellen, however, was not at all turned off by anything flashy. She loved glitz and glamour which seemed at odds with her husband's personality. The show insinuates that while the couple was an odd match, Mary Ellen's sexual magnetism seemed to keep her husband under her spell. But her spell couldn't last forever and after a few years of marriage the couple separated. When her husband started the divorce proceedings, Mary Ellen realized that in a divorce she would lose everything, but if her husband somehow turned up dead she stood to earn

a great deal. After his death, Mary Ellen received the house and a large insurance payment, though the money she received would not last long at the rate she was spending it. The audience is told that Mary Ellen got a new boyfriend and bought him a new Porsche. She also lavished herself with new clothes and as the narrator tells the audience she especially frequented Trashy Lingerie. Mary Ellen loved her new found fortune and *Snapped* makes this evident by constantly showing a picture her boyfriend took of her naked while lying in a pile of money.

Many people suspected Mary Ellen of killing her husband, but the cops had no proof to arrest her on. It wasn't until the killer she hired turned up dead that cops called her in for questioning. When she was interviewed Mary Ellen used her sensuality to put cops under her spell. A female detective states "she was dressed in a low cut outfit and certainly made sure that it was noticeable. At one point, she put her hand on the detective's bald head and talked about how she loved bald guys." This is a constant theme in Mary Ellen's story: her seductive ways trick men into walking into her dangerous web. Of course, cops were tricked by her ways. Eventually they were able to find evidence that pinned her to both crimes and she was given the death penalty.

Stories like Adrienne Hickson and Mary Ellen Samuels work as proof of Eve's continued existence in women. Though each of these women may have had many unfeminine characteristics their stories begin the same as many women's do. They live average lives and though they had their flaws, no one thought those flaws would become lethal. Stories like these point to the possibility of all women "snapping," which further strengthens the myth of feminine evil and continues to perpetuate the assumed need for female control because if any woman can "snap," how else is a society to protect its self?

CHAPTER FIVE: PATRIARCHAL CATHARSIS AND THE UNDOING OF VIOLENT WOMEN

Snapped showcases women who undermine patriarchal social order, but the show is able to restore patriarchal authority through the cathartic function of the show. The show's ending, in which the woman is socially and judicially punished, deflates any threat she may have posed earlier in the episode. The catharsis created in *Snapped* allows audience members to release the tensions they may have about patriarchal social order. This purging of tensions lulls audience members back into finding comfort in their subordinate position. While showing authentic female violence may seem progressive and even feminist, the structure and narrative of the show weaken this element by punishing the "snapped" women for their gender deviance.

The analysis of the advertisements aired during *Snapped* that was outlined in chapter one illustrated that the audience is very similar to the women the show profiles. The commonalities between the audience and the "snapped" women both in gender and class create a foundation for a cathartic experience. The female audience can very easily identify with the "snapped" women, which helps to create pity. In chapter one it was asserted that *Snapped* creates identification between audience members and "snapped" women by introducing each profile with a depiction of the woman as normal and sane. Both the similarities between the audience and the women profiled, as well as *Snapped*'s intended audience identification, help to create the first component of catharsis. Once the

woman enacts her crime, the audience divorces the connection that was previously made earlier in the episode. The emotion of pity then turns to fears because of the “snapped” woman’s disruption of the social order and gender hierarchy. These two feelings - pity and fear - invoked by the narratives of *Snapped* are purged once the episode concludes with the woman's conviction and sentencing which restores and, therefore, reaffirms social order. This release cleanses audience members of any animosity or tension that they may have previously had. This chapter will first discuss the history and meaning of catharsis, and then analyze the cathartic experience that is created within *Snapped*. The social function of catharsis will be further developed and will be connected to *Snapped* in order to illustrate how the show reconfirms patriarchal social order.

HISTORY AND DEFINITION

Catharsis has a rather long theoretical history, whose path crosses multiple disciplines. The term was originally coined by Aristotle, and he developed it from the medical term for purging. When he first theorized catharsis, he kept its original meaning intact, using it only to describe a bodily expulsion (Belifiore, 1992). As Hawhee asserts "Catharsis is not a simple term; its history is by no means meek" (2009 p.136). She goes on to state that “Aristotelian *Katharsis* is the pleasurable telos of tragedy’s pain and destruction. As such, and more generally, *Katharsis* traverses domains of physicality, cognition, ethics, education, medicine, music and religion” (2009 p.136).

Aristotle later developed the term to take on a more metaphorical meaning in which catharsis was the act of purging the emotions of pity and fear that are aroused when viewing tragedy. He wrote, “[t]ragedy, then, is an imitation of a noble and complete

action, having the proper magnitude; it employs language that has been artistically enhanced . . . ; it is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such incidents” (Aristotle, 1981 p.11). Unlike Plato, who viewed both mimesis and the cathartic effect it could invoke as a societal danger, Aristotle found catharsis to not only achieve a positive social function, but to also be a necessary part of a healthy society. Plato argued that catharsis could undermine the State and lead to violence (Halliwell, 2002), but Aristotle asserted that it would have the opposite effect since the release of emotions would squash any motivation for violence. The purging of emotions, Aristotle stressed, would not encourage tension but, rather, would release it.

Catharsis has been adopted by other disciplines such as psychology and literary theory, though its meaning has changed little with its adoption into other fields. For instance, in literary theory it is defined as

the release of the emotions of pity and fear by the audience at the end of a tragedy. The audience faces the misfortunes of the protagonist, which elicit pity and compassion. Simultaneously, the audience also confronts the failure of the protagonist, thus receiving a frightening reminder of human limitations and frailties. Ultimately, however, both these negative emotions are purged, because the tragic protagonist’s suffering is an affirmation of human values rather than a despairing denial of them (Meyer, 2008 p.89).

Rhetorical theory also has a similar notion of catharsis. Hyde and Jost (1997) assert that “Catharsis must be understood as an equivalent of medical purging and religious purification: a clarification carried out by intelligent participation” (p. 65). The term still

possesses an emphasis on purging and cleansing. Hyde and Jost go on to state that it “must, finally, be opposed to persuasion. Contrary to all seduction or flattery, it consists in the imaginative reconstruction of the two basic emotions by which we participate in any great deed: pity and fear. Fear and pity are in turn metaphorized, in a way, by this imaginative reconstruction in which, thanks to *muthos* [myth], the creative imitation of human actions consists” (1997 p.66).

For the focus of this chapter, Kenneth Burke’s extension of Aristotle’s definition of catharsis will be utilized. Burke understood the theory of catharsis as relevant to his theories of dramatism. As Hawhee states “dramatic catharsis stems from a broader theory of poetics that depends on the magical properties of language. Burke’s mystical methodology recognizes and values these same prosperities; words themselves in their clarifying and obfuscating capacities participate in a cathartic economy” (Hawhee, 2009 p.136). Burke extended the function of catharsis to having a disciplinary value for society. The release of emotions not only purges inclinations for violence, but also works to restore societal order so as to quell social tensions that pose a detriment to the state. This aspect of catharsis will be addressed after the mechanisms behind catharsis are explained.

PITY AND FEAR

Burke (1962) sees catharsis as a “ritual of purification” (p.170), which does not diverge much from Aristotle’s use of the emotions of pity and fear. Burke states “We might say that tragic catharsis involves first an intensified appeal to pity and fear, then the

resolving of such emotions” (1962 p.170). Where he does expand upon this definition is in the contradictory notions of these two emotions:

[A]nalysts of tragedy have pointed to an essential conflict in the relation between pity and fear, with tragedy being viewed as the resolution of this antithesis. Pity is said to be like a movement-towards; and fear (or “terror”) like a movement away-from. Thus, in sympathetically following a work that causes us to feel both pity and fear at once, we are combining contradictory impulses. And are healed by being enabled to put opposites together in a way that transcends their opposition (Burke, 1959 p.341).

Burke argues that the stretching of one’s emotions from pity to fear offers one the opportunity to rise above the emotional tug of war by mending the two emotions. Burke states “[a]nd it is not hard to imagine how pity, fear and pride figure here: for there is a purifying in the ecstatically pitiful contemplation of the victim's suffering, and in virtuous resolves that go with reinvigorated pious fear of the great powers” (p.135). The fear that one feels towards the “snapped” woman is really a fear of the threat she poses to society. It is her ability to undermine the rule of law that makes her threatening, but once the rule of law is reestablished with her punishment the audience then returns to fearing the rule of law. Seeing the “snapped” women removes any fear that chaos may occur because the rule of law has restored justice and order.

One theme that becomes clear throughout the show is that of dissatisfaction. These *Snapped* women were not happy with their positions in life. Whether they wanted more money, a new husband or a completely different life, each “snapped” woman took power into her own hands and, for a moment, got what she wanted. Female audience

members can personally relate to this theme. While their goals may not be as fatal as that of the women on the show, audience members can still understand what it is like to live a life that offers little satisfaction. The societal constraints that are placed on women mold them into selfless mothers, docile wives and dutiful daughters. These roles leave women with little room for happiness and no room for complaining. Seeing women on their television screens acting out against their dissatisfaction heightens, and brings to the surface, audience members' own personal dissatisfaction. Rueckert states that in “tragedy, pollution – tensions, irresolutions, psychoses, guilt, discord – is exploited for cathartic purposes. All manner of ‘personal’ tensions are exploited in the tragic imitation to heighten the cathartic effect. The members of the audience make a direct identification with these tensions and react to them in the most profound and personal way; their reactions are *self*-directed even though it is [the character] whom they pity” (Rueckert 1969 p.392 emphasis in original).

The anger and unhappiness that stem from the female audience members subordinate positions within patriarchal society are being manipulated in order to get them to react on a personal level and be attracted to the women profiled on *Snapped*. This tension, which audience members may not even realize they suppress, emerges because of the emotional connection created by the narratives of the “snapped” women. The episode gives female audience members the opportunity to let their disappointment and frustration fester, but this occasion does not offer audience members a true solution. Instead, the ending of the episode changes the women's complacency with their subordinate position into a feeling of acceptance and comfort. This emotional change

derives from two issues: the punishment of the woman and the female audience's fear of chaos.

The “snapped” woman's act allows her to attain a power she never could by remaining within the confines of gender norms. Her violence bestows her with individual agency and the victim's gender negates her subordinate position as a woman. This creates her as a clear threat to patriarchal social order because she undermines the authority of the system. Whether audience members are dissatisfied with the system that oppresses them or not, it still offers them social order which trumps any freedoms audience members may receive by overturning the system. Humans, by nature, rank, evaluate and grade the world around them, which is why Burke states that humans are “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy” (Burke, 1966 p.15). A system that has clear boundaries and rules is comfortable for society because it helps to keep society functioning properly; it is the operating principle in human social existence. As Burke (1950) states, “the hierarchic principle is indigenous to all well-rounded human thinking” (p.141). Burke viewed social order as a very natural and inevitable part of human nature. Jasinski (2001) states “Human social life, Burke suggested, involves the perpetual struggle to create, maintain and overturn an economic-political order. Whereas order might be the pivotal term in Burke's theory of human relations, hierarchy is its substance or ‘structural principle’” (p.300).

The disruption of the system that holds society together, whether oppressive or not, leaves individuals with no way of understanding or interacting with those around them. Life would be drastically altered and an intrinsic part of human nature would be destroyed. Hierarchical structures are important components of society, and at times they

can become so much a part of a culture that society fears its dismantlement. As Duncan states “When the enactment of hierarchy becomes so dogmatic and the stages of development so rigid that doubt, question, or creation of new hierarchies are no longer possible and, indeed, are *punishable*, we enter the realm of hierarchical psychosis” (as cited in Jasinski, 2001 p.301 emphasis in original). One of the components of catharsis is experiencing fear, and this fear is largely due to hierarchal psychosis. As Rueckert states “Tragedy, better than any kind of text best illustrates . . . that hierarchical psychosis is everywhere with us and everywhere a threat in *intimating* various forms of this hierarchic or social *tension*, tragedy activates and releases this tension in us, and purges off, vicariously, as imitations (not realities) do, the more dangerous parts or aspects of it” (1994 p.78 emphasis in original).

Through murder the “snapped” woman upsets the horizontal ordering of society. She relieves herself of the societal shackles that have kept in her position of passivity in which she posed no threat. These women are not only threatening for the act that they have committed, but for the larger context that surrounds female murderers. On almost all of the episodes of *Snapped* one of two things is mentioned. The first is that no one knew that the woman was capable of such a crime. This presents the woman as devious and as having the ability to trick her victims since no one sees her coming. The second is that the “snapped” woman has created the perfect crime (or almost perfect in episode when they are caught). Although it is not showcased as often, some women are never arrested and others are acquitted, and the women that are caught are usually not arrested immediately because detectives have a difficult time finding evidence. These factors combined with evidence listed earlier that states that women’s method of killing and mannerisms allow

them to continue to kill without being caught for longer periods of time all adds up to one conclusion: women could, in fact, be better than men at an act that is within the domains of masculinity. This is alarming not only for the fact that it proves dangerous for men but also because women are proving to be more successful at an act which offers men the ability to prove their masculinity by showing that they are what Gilligan (2001) terms as “violence-objects.”

For an individual to feel pity, though, at some level identification must be established. There are many characters that can be tragically flawed but are not seen as worthy of the audience’s pity. In order to pity, some aspect of the character must be seen as similar to the audience. It is identification that humanizes the perpetrator so that the audience can see the individual that is behind the crime. Burke (1962) states that there is an “emotional release through pity for the victim” (p.146). Catharsis is only effective when identification is possible, otherwise only fear exists. Though the feared character’s punishment may restore social order, the audience is not purged in any way. If fear is only present then one is not given the opportunity to purge the emotions they harbor. It is identification and pity – not fear – that brings these emotions to the surface. Audience members of *Snapped* see these women as similar to themselves and their dormant desire to overthrow a system that oppresses them is then released. It is fear that then makes the audience members understand the consequences of overthrowing the system: chaos. The “snapped” woman represents a dissolving of social order and disintegration into anarchy.

In Burke’s most basic definition of “transcendence” it is the finding of a higher commonality in order to rise above the differences present. In *The rites of identity: the religious naturalism and cultural criticism of Kenneth Burke and Ralph Ellison*, Eddy

writes that “[t]ragedy provides catharsis because it allows for delegation of one’s burden to a sacrificial vessel, the tragic hero. Theatricalized tragedy is pleasurable because one at the same time can both suffer (through identification with the hero) and not suffer (because the play is, after all, a dramatic performance and not real)” (Eddy, 2003 p.62). Clearly, this applies differently to *Snapped* in regards to catharsis theory because these stories are not dramas, but rather real stories of a woman’s demise. Although *Snapped* is not a performance, in many ways the ludicrousness and monstrosity of these narratives work to undermine the reality of the show. The plotlines and the "snapped" women surrounding them seem impossible in our world and this distances the audience from accepting *Snapped* as total truth.

It is not a coincidence that the women *Snapped*’s producers choose are relatable to audience members; in fact, the show picks women who are similar viewers. According to the show’s producer most of the women portrayed are “subjects the average viewer can relate to,” at least to a certain extent (as cited in Kingston, 2008 p. 121). As Kingston states, “the program serves as reality-check TV for its stressed, overscheduled viewers who probably harbor a few husbandicide fantasies of their own” (Kingston, 2008 p. 121). The audience may relate to the frustration and disappointment of being relegated to the positions of homemaker, underappreciated wife, overworked mother, or underemployed and underpaid employee, which many of *Snapped*’s women were before they enacted murder.

The identification that has manifested through the narrative of the woman’s early life creates pity in the audience when the woman’s fate is realized. This normal, seemingly sane woman has committed an unthinkable crime, and it is this crime that

creates fear because while her exterior and past say she's normal and like the audience, her crime makes clearly evident that she is not. This factor works to increase the appeal of the show and also works to create a cathartic experience. There is an emotional investment in these characters because they work as "symbolic mirrors" in which the audience sees a small part of themselves in them, so what happens in the fantasy of the drama in some ways becomes a reality internally for the audience. The character's actions are imbued with meaning that connects him/her to the audience and the conclusion of the drama releases the tension that has built up inside. This same function is produced for the female audience that watches *Snapped* and sees gender deviants enact violence they never could; in seeing this, the audience is "purged" or cured of the tensions that were brought about by the woman's story. The female audience can vicariously act out these tensions through the "snapped" woman.

SOCIAL FUNCTION OF CATHARSIS

In *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, Calwerti (1976) addresses the reasons behind the popularity of crime dramas and detective series, and although *Snapped* doesn't directly fall under those categories as a television show the ideas are still applicable. These shows, like *Snapped*, give the audience a sense of fulfillment because the criminal being portrayed – or the "snapped" woman being showcased – can act out what the audience never could. That is not to say that everyone wants to enact murder or rob a bank, but fantasies surrounding shows like this have more to do with the symbolic meaning of the criminal action rather than the action itself. By engaging in criminal activity, the criminal is breaking away from societal norms and defying all forms of

power; it is that bold gesture that creates the ultimate fantasy in the minds of the audience. By identifying with the criminal the audience can engage in imagined transgression without the actual punishment of the crime or the violence or guilt that comes with physically acting out. As stated earlier, the transgression enacted by a "snapped" woman is much more deviant because of her gender since she has transgressed both the rule of law and the rules of her gender. As a member of society she is expected to follow societal codes, and as a woman she is expected to remain passive and obedient, but through the act of murder she has broken both of these expectations. The deviance that is housed in the "snapped" women as well as the enjoyment the audience receives from her transgressions makes the show ripe for catharsis.

The same issue that Cawelti outlines – the pleasure that one can feel from watching a societal transgression occur – is also present in catharsis. As Burke (1962) states, “Catharsis is bound to involve civic matters somehow. For in the last analysis it has to do with order, and men's ideas of order necessarily the nature of their social systems” (p.176). Order is present in narratives that produce catharsis because of the fact the justice is restored and those seen as rebelling are restored to positions of powerlessness and passivity. This return to order to intended to relieve the audience of any fear they may have had about the possibility of their social order being dissolved into chaos. Burke (1962) states “[t]ragedy as a civic ceremony would involved specifically civic motives. And in this respect, we are suggesting, the catharsis would result from the easing of specifically civic tensions. Yet, since such tensions involve conflicts of interest (roughly, class conflicts) that are not in their essence aesthetic at all, it would follow that

a tragedy could bridge conflicts only insofar as groups differently interested were to this extent differently 'purged'" (p.150).

When formulating catharsis theory the tensions that were traditionally present in the audience were tensions of class with audience members of the lower class watching those of upper class status in tragic situations. In *Snapped*, rather than a class conflict there is a conflict involving gender. Instead of being lower in socioeconomic status, women are subordinate because of the sexual organs they possess. While not agreeing with the "snapped" woman's actions, the audience members take pleasure in the "snapped" woman's undermining of patriarchal order. The audience may identify with the roles these "snapped" women play. Roles such as the selfless housewife or the overworked and underappreciated mother may become familiar to the audience and through this identification hostility towards gender inequity that may have been dormant within the audience now arises. This hostility is then released by the audience members watching the "snapped" woman because they are able to vicariously undermine the social order.

This vicarious experience is what releases the audience of their hostility, and the aggression that the female audience may harbor against their subordinate position within patriarchal social order can be purged by the resolution of the episode. Seeing these women convicted and sentenced reestablishes authority in showing the "[t]he catharsis of 'release', must not only arise out of the regulatory, it must also be shaped so that the very modes of emancipation somehow help to re-establish the regulations for which they are the 'cure'. Thus tragedy, as a somewhat secular way of responding to such intricacy, also may serve to reimpose the very burdens it would remove" (Burke, 1959 p.366). This is

particularly important because of catharsis's reliance on fear since it "...lends itself well to the asseverating of 'justice'" (Burke, 1959 p.347).

In discussing catharsis, Burke focuses on multiple Greek dramas to illustrate his point. One drama that he discusses, *The Oresteia*, deals with a conflict involving gender not class. He states (1962) that the drama "... is a truly perfect illustration of the civic motive, since it is nothing less than a dramatized myth designed to glorify the nature of Greek Justice (which is to say, it is designed to glorify the Athenian order, seen as the transcending of feudal conflict)." (p.154 emphasis in original). The glorification of justice is also present in *Snapped* when the women are not only socially punished, but judicially punished as well. The women are seen as disowned by society not just in the fact that they are sentenced to prison, but by the show's demonizing of their lack of femininity and humanity. The show characterizes the women as embodying pure evil and each iniquity they possess is highlighted for all to see. Interviews, pictures and home videos are all used to objectify, humiliate and demonize the woman. These "snapped" women become scapegoats and are punished both by the show and criminal justice system in a way that ignores the larger problems surrounding lethal female violence.

The importance of the vilification of women in cathartic narratives is highlighted in Burke's continued discussion of Greek drama. Here instead of focusing on *The Oresteia* he discusses *Medea* which has a similar revenge plot line:

In the case of Euripides, the mounting disorders of Athenian society made for a tendency towards an eruption of the factional. But often this was ambiguously transcended by his portraits of women, who certainly were submerged as a class (in line with Aristotle's grouping of the intellectually and socially inferior;

"women, children, and slaves"), yet for this reason might stand deviously for the underprivileged in general (whose incipiently revolutionary cause would be expressed not just in the accents of sympathy, but also fearsomely, as with the dread acts of his Medea drastically avenging her abandonment by Jason). As the mythic builder of the "first" Greek ship, as Argonaut and ruler, Jason obviously represented basic motives of the Athenian patrilineal state, itself built atop an earlier matriarchal culture. And in the Oates-O'Neil volumes, *The Complete Greek Drama*, it is noted that . . . Euripides has been censured for his ending (in which Medea is allowed to escape) (p.155).

In both *The Oresteia* and *Medea* the main female characters are early versions of "snapped" women as they seek revenge against men who have wronged them. In *The Oresteia* Clytaemnestra's husband, Agamemnon, sacrificed their daughter in order to calm the Thracian winds. In addition to this cruel sacrifice, Agamemnon was unfaithful while away and brings back a new mistress when he returns. Medea's husband, Jason, has also been unfaithful, and then leaves Medea to enter into a more beneficial marriage. In the end Clytaemnestra kills her husband, Agamemnon, and Medea kills her husband's new bride as well as their children.

Though both women were able to achieve the revenge they wished for, the stories end drastically different. Clytaemnestra is murdered by her son whereas Medea is saved at the last minute by a winged chariot before Jason has the opportunity to murder her. Clytaemnestra's death creates a cathartic function because the audience can understand her desire to kill her husband, and therefore pity her action, but her act of murder disturbs the social order, particularly because she is killing someone who is thought to be superior

to her. Clytaemnestra is expected to accept her fate and know that she has no control over her husband's actions. Agamemnon's murder and infidelity are issues that Clytaemnestra must tolerate because her husband is privileged in his gender. In the play, Clytaemnestra functions to challenge social order, but her son functions to uphold order and through his murder of Clytaemnestra he reestablishes the rule of law. Though both enact murder that can be seen as unjustified, it is Clytaemnestra's son who survives in the end, which reaffirms the virtue of his murder as opposed to hers. Clytaemnestra's death is punishment for her crime and also functions as a physical purging of her gender and social deviance from Greek society.

Medea's story lacks a cathartic function because order is not upheld. Medea is allowed to escape and go unpunished in a manner that is uncharacteristic of Greek tragedy. Aristotle criticized the ending of the play as illogical because the play was abruptly solved with the contrived and unexpected intervention of a chariot (Worthington, 1990). This ending, rather than punishing Medea for disobeying the rule of law, rewards her for her actions. The audience is not able to release the fear that is created from seeing the chaos Medea produces. Instead of being cleansed the audience is left with fear that the social order cannot protect society from women like Medea.

SNAPPED AND CATHARSIS

Brenda Andrews represents a clear example of the cathartic function that is present within *Snapped*. Brenda Andrews was a loving mother and wife who also worked as a Sunday school teacher. She displayed traditional characteristics of femininity by putting everyone else above herself. She married her high school sweetheart and

followed him off to college, only really caring about his success. When he landed his first job, Brenda tried to pursue a career in banking, but that changed after she had a child. Brenda later became a full time mom and was the perfect image of a housewife. Young, attractive, devoted, passive, and religious, she was the envy of all other housewives. And things were going so well for Brenda: her husband had landed a lucrative advertising job and they moved to an affluent neighborhood, but then things started to change. The narrator highlights this change of events by stating “A loving husband, two beautiful children, a big house in the suburbs, by most standards Brenda Andrews had achieved it all. But as her 40th birthday approached she began to question what she became in the process.”

The rethinking of her life may have had something to do with a new relationship she had developed with an older and *male* Sunday school teacher. Church goers complained of the new provocative and tight dresses she was wearing, though those descriptions seem hyperbolic in comparison to the pictures the viewers of *Snapped* were shown. Many members also noticed the amount of time she was spending with her fellow Sunday school teacher James. One of the show’s many forensic psychologists states that “women can attempt to become the perfect suburban mom. These types of women have difficulty discovering inside of themselves who and what they are, what will make them happy, what fits with their talents and strengths.” Brenda’s constant consideration for everyone but herself left her with no true identity and her behavior radically changed. Another forensic psychologist on the show stated that “James allowed her to close the door on this suburban housewife conservative person and move on to be

this more adventurous, dramatic, you know, excitement-oriented person,” which of course as a mother, wife and Sunday school teacher she could not be.

Brenda’s story, like all the women’s stories on *Snapped*, taps into narratives and struggles the audience can identify with. In Brenda’s case the loss of identity that is symptomatic of the selfless wife and mother was what drew the audience in. It is not the specifics of her life that are important, but rather the theme the details of her story create. Many women can identify with the act of giving up a part of themselves for a man. Whether they moved, scarified a job/career or friends or even a little freedom for a relationship, most female audience members can see a little bit of Brenda in themselves.

Audience members may see Brenda’s questioning of her life as akin to their own experiences. Her personal turmoil and her dissatisfaction with the way her life has turned out are both relatable to many members of the audience and something they can understand. Her personal and marital troubles show a blemish in her perfect life, which makes her that much more identifiable. The facade that Brenda upheld dutifully is the same one many other women uphold in their lives. Brenda’s mix of perfection and imperfection creates her as an easily identifiable character, one that effortlessly generates pity.

Pity is an emotion that easily manifests from hearing Brenda Andrew’s story, but her story does not end there. A few months after the couple had separated, Rob, Brenda’s husband, stopped by to pick up the kids. When he arrived Brenda asked him to help her with the furnace in the garage. While in the garage, a burglar barged in shooting both Brenda and Rob, shots that proved fatal for Rob. Police investigating the crime quickly discovered that Brenda had been having an affair with James, the Sunday school teacher,

and also discovered he was an insurance salesman who had recently sold Rob a million-dollar life insurance policy. Rob's friends stated in interviews to *Snapped* that Rob feared for his life, and that he had become suspicious of his wife and the insurance agent. Once the police had discovered this they went to arrest Brenda, but she and James were nowhere to be found. Three months later, the couple was arrested at the Mexican border, along with Brenda's children. James and Brenda were tried separately, but the verdicts were the same: guilty with a sentence of the death penalty. Though her defense attorney argued that James was the real mastermind behind the crime, it was not enough. The episode ends with a black screen that reads "She is the only woman on Oklahoma's death row."

It is the earlier narratives that work to create pity and it is the end of the narrative that creates fear both in her severe punishment and complete change of character. Brenda would seem like the last possible person capable of such a crime. Fear manifests from the fact that she could so greatly transgress patriarchal social order. She was a woman who epitomized the perfect mother and housewife, but those submissive roles were ineffective at keeping her from posing a danger to society. Within the patriarchal social order exists a covenant, or an agreement about the appropriate behaviors that women are allowed to engage in; Brenda's actions clearly broke this agreement.

The ending of the episode works to reaffirm the legitimacy of the social order. The death sentence of Brenda represents a societal cleansing of social and gender deviance. Stability is reasserted, which reaffirms the legitimacy and power of the social order. Her sentence shows that those who defy the social order will be punished, and Brenda's punishment frees the audience members of the fears they had about the

possibility of chaos. Fear is not only created in the identification that was produced earlier in the episode, but also in the monstrosity of her crime.

CONCLUSION

As British politician Lord Astor put it, “[e]veryone starts out totally dependent on a woman. The idea that she could turn out to be your enemy is terribly frightening,” but what he forgot to add is “and makes for great television and ratings” (as cited in Ludwig & Birkbeck, 2006 p. 192). It is this dynamic of a double deviant woman – one that defies both gender and societal codes – that attracts audience members to the show. Deep down many women long to leave it all behind and to finally – and truly – leave the system that has oppressed them for so long. Although many do not want to kill their husbands or significant others – and this is not an action that should be condoned – the idea of an evil woman enacting crimes that the audience never could is intensely satisfying to those lacking power.

Even though the show’s title is a complete misnomer, the question the audience needs to ask is if this is the only possible manner in which a woman can “snap”. Instead of characterizing “snapping” as a dangerous break from sanity in which a woman’s “irrational” actions pose a grave threat to patriarchal social order, why could it not instead be a moment of clarity, a moment in which there is a move towards consciousness, a time where everything suddenly makes sense? Why can’t a woman “snap” and realize that she no longer has to take the sexual discrimination at work she faces or a woman who all her life has put herself last, “snaps” and realizes that she needs to consider her own needs as just as important? Why can’t women “snap” out of the

gender scripts they have been acting out their whole lives or "snap" out of trying to fit into the unrealistic and demeaning molds that patriarchal values have set up for them? Too much time has passed since women were characterized as hysterical in the Victorian age and it is time society redefines the meaning of "snapping" and showcases the ways in which women move towards a feminist consciousness and break away from being victims of the system. For every black widow *Snapped* showcases there are hundreds of other women truly "snapping," not acting out of evil, malice or madness but truly taking power back into their own hands. It is these women female audience members must celebrate in order to regain their symbolic power in the media and no longer be trivialized or demonized for the actions of a few.

Throughout this thesis the demonization and trivialization of the women on *Snapped* has been analyzed through the combined lenses of feminist theory and rhetorical theory, particularly the theories of Kenneth Burke. In the introduction, it was argued that this combination of methodologies would be appropriate, regardless of their differences, because both methodologies focus on hierarchies within society and language. This method of analysis has proven very beneficial for this thesis by offering this essayist multiple ways of looking at the show. For instance, when analyzing the idea of "snapping", it can be seen through the theory of motion, by understanding "snapping" as a stimulus response reaction which the actor has no control over. This same idea can also be seen through feminist theory as a characterization of a woman's actions that ignore her agency and instead plays upon archaic notions of female hysteria. Though this combination of methodologies worked for this particular thesis, that does not mean that it will work for any scholar who is conducting an interdisciplinary analysis of popular

culture. This methodology worked because Burkean theory proved relevant for the focus of this project. If components of the show were different in which catharsis was not present or pentadic analysis did prove necessary, this method would not have been effective. The combination of Burkean theory with feminist theory is not a new method - as was also discussed on the introduction - and has proved effective for other scholars, but only when there is a necessity for it. This essayist is happy with the overall results of this methodology and would recommend it for future scholars conducting similar projects.

This thesis only focused only one television show, and, to television viewers who are familiar with the Oxygen network, it may be considered an unpopular show. Though it could be said that *Snapped* is not nearly as relevant a show as other crime dramas, both real and dramatized, narratives like these are more prevalent than once thought to be. New shows like *Deadly Women*, *Snapped: Women Who Kill* and *Women Behind Bars* demonstrate that the nation's fixation with female killers is slowly increasing. Also, a very high percentage of the women featured on *Snapped* have had books written about them, some have had more than one, and others have been featured on other crime shows that do not only feature female murderers. This shows that a focus on female killers is a much larger trend than just *Snapped*. Stories of horrendous crimes committed by seemingly normal women are enticing audiences into narratives in which monstrous women exist.

Snapped, and the books and shows that are extending its ideology, highlight a fascination within our culture for dangerous and evil women. In fact, it may be an even larger trend of audience obsession with female aberrance. Shows of crazy brides, bad

girls, cheaters, and gold diggers make up the majority of shows on the two most popular networks for women's television: Oxygen and WE. With slogans like "We have more fun" and "Live Out Loud" one would think the audience would be entertained with shows that actually show women having fun. The only fun seen on these networks is synonymous with deviance. It seems ironic that on networks intended to celebrate women, they just punish their female audience for aberrance.

Further examination of these two trends, both the obsession with narratives of real female killers as well as more shows focusing on female aberrance, are important issues which surround the context of *Snapped* and have not yet gotten the academic attention that is needed. The deviant female is a figure that has long held audience fascination, but the new focus on it may benefit from research. Is this symptomatic of a backlash against second wave feminism in which women's gained liberties are perceived to have unleashed women's inherent evil? What pleasure do audience members gain from seeing their gender being portrayed in such a negative light? Does self identification with such characters pose a detriment to audience members' self-esteem and conceptions of their gender? These are questions that could not be addressed because of the scope of this thesis but should be focused on in future research.

One interesting discovery that was made while watching other shows that focused on female murderers was that no other show characterized female lethal violence as manifesting out of a break with reality. Instead, most shows painted a picture of a cold and calculating killer. For instance, a show on the Discovery Investigation network entitled *Deadly Women* focuses on different types of female murderers each episode. One episode focused on "Angels of Death" in which women in the medical field would kill

unsuspecting victims. Another episode entitled "Black Widows" focused on women who preyed on their loved ones. These women are not seen as victims of their unstable emotions; instead, they are seen as evil killers who are more effective than their male counterparts. In the episode entitled "Black Widows", Judi Buenoeano's tale terror is chronicled as a classic story of a black widow. The entire episode

In many ways the show seems surreal. Instead of the gritty reality *Snapped* shows its audience, *Deadly Women* is a stylized horror movie. Each of the women portrayed is monstrous and alien. In reenactment scene, the footage is sped up at certain points in order to make the woman's actions seem inhumanly fast. At other points

The strength and popularity of *Snapped* lies in its use of one of the most deviant of all female characters: the "femme fatale". Although the idea of the "femme fatale" has long existed in popular culture, *Snapped* is now imbuing authenticity and potency into the myth by showing real women in a reality show format. Not only does this further the myth of feminine evil, but it strengthens it. It gives real instances that can be pointed to in order to prove the myth's veracity. As has been stated many times before, this poses a real danger for women behind bars and women being abused. The reason this point is continually highlighted is because of the potential damage this show could have on the use of battered spouse syndrome in court. It is already a difficult defense to convince juries of, and, as was made evident by research listed in earlier chapters, juries are much harsher to women who kill their husbands as opposed to husbands who kill their wives. There is a movement to free women who have been locked away for unjustified reasons, and *Snapped* clearly undermines this action by showing the claim of self defense as a mechanism for these women to get away with their crimes.

Though misogynistic conceptions of women have lost the factual standing they once had, these myths have been resurrected by popular culture, especially in shows like *Snapped*. Understanding lethal female violence through the framework of "snapping" ignores the individual motives and contexts that surround the crime. It groups lethal female violence in a manner that makes the reasons behind the horrendous acts easily digestible for its audience by giving a very demeaning and inaccurate answer to the question of why women kill. *Snapped* strips the woman of choice by characterizing her actions as outside of a rational, and therefore masculine, domain. What are clear actions (both in the traditional sense and in the Burkean sense) become motion by *Snapped*'s portrayals of the murders. Instead of murders as cold and calculating acts, they are seen as inevitable breaks with sanity. These women were victims of their own instability, but yet they are demonized for their conniving ability to lure their victims in. The show's paradoxical nature in which a woman is ruled by her hormones and sexual organs, but yet can lure men to their death works to reconfirm two contradictory (and sexist) notions of women. Both the myth of feminine evil and female hysteria become integral parts to how *Snapped* shows the multiplicities of the dangers women pose to society.

Any dangers which women could truly pose, though, are suppressed by the cathartic nature of *Snapped*. The two components of the show – the leading up to and the ultimate consequences of the woman "snapping" – work to produce the pity and fear necessary for a purging of tensions. Once again the show asks the audience to buy into two paradoxical ideas. The audience member must see the woman as akin to herself and feel sorry for her, but the audience must also fear her for her monstrosity and horrendous crime and thus her defiance of the social order. It is the resolution of the show, with the

woman's arrest and conviction, that allows the audience to be purged of not only the emotions that show provokes but also emotions that relate to the hierarchal tensions the show plays upon. This cleansing relieves the audience of their unresolved hostility and shows audience members the consequences of such actions. In the end, justice is restored and the audience is purged of urges they may have harbored that could eventually prove harmful to the social order. The show restores social order in its punishment of the women, returning the social order back to normal by ridding society of these evil women.

Women who are not convicted are socially punished by the show. Each woman's iniquity is highlighted and criticized, punishing her for her promiscuity, sexual agency and lack of feminine qualities. The social ostracism that occurs in the show, regardless of whether the women are convicted or not, works to replace the lost conviction, or, what is more often the case, further punish them in a way that makes the women examples for the audience. The show seems to make one message clear: you can and will "snap," so control the moral defect you possess, or you will end up just like a "snapped" woman who is socially and judicially punished for her crimes.

An interesting comparison to *Snapped*, as well as a testament to the popularity of shows featuring deviant women, is the show on the WE network entitled *Women Behind Bars*. The show also focuses on women who kill their spouses and also has few abuse cases, but the show diverges from the sensational appeal of *Snapped*. For instance, the show's tag line is "Before you judge, listen to their stories." The show doesn't highlight women's inherently evil natures and does humanize the women much more by tying their actions to societal forces rather than a mental lapse with reality. Though the show is an improvement on *Snapped*'s overly dramatized narratives and horrendous version of lethal

female violence, *Women Behind Bars* is not the antithesis of *Snapped*, but it is, however, much less dangerous. *Women Behind Bars* is also a successful show which demonstrates that the use of a less sensational narrative can be successful when focusing on female felons, but only to a certain extent:

“Women Behind Bars” is the modestly — no, marginally — higher-minded response to the Oxygen network’s series “Snapped,” a half-hour show that digs through the case files of female killers to turn up those who have rid themselves of unambitious husbands in places where trailer-park existence dulls but life-insurance policies can get hefty. “Women Behind Bars” instead offers a catalog of victim-killers, felons who could truly be guilty or not, women who may have murdered because drug use hijacked their sounder judgments or because they were manipulated or abused. This isn’t the land of double-indemnity rub-outs. (Bellafante, 2008 para. 2)

What is important to note is that the show does allow different catalysts of crime, other than the pure wickedness of the criminal, to become visible to the audience. Even with crimes that seem completely heinous, *Women Behind Bars* does create more dimensional characters that one can sympathize and even empathize with. One such example is evident in the case of a young woman who goes by the name of Baby Doll. Bellafante (2008) states she is “a gangland girlfriend who with two friends strangled, stabbed and slashed the heels of another young woman to prevent her from testifying against Baby Doll’s boyfriend. Why did Baby Doll do this? Because her man expected her to, just as he might have wanted her to pick up the dry cleaning or a pound of bacon. Gangland culture’s gender politics are really what’s at fault” (para. 5).

The show in some ways still trivializes these women's difficult situations by fetishizing the details of each crime. Many times the obsessive focus of the show mirrors *Snapped*:

There is no hideous, exploitative detail undisclosed. Stacey Lannert, who admittedly killed her father years ago after nearly a lifetime of sexual abuse, tells us that his initial attempts at molestation involved his applying "marshmallow cream to his personal area." Her story is tragic — she is serving a life sentence without parole — but the series still leaves you feeling dirty even when there is genuine cause to feel bad. Ms. Lannert explains that on some level she enjoys prison because for the first time she feels totally in control of her body and, as she says, "what happens to it." (Bellafante, 2008 para. 10)

On the show, the women are interviewed in order to give their side of the story which is something that is rarely seen on *Snapped*. A woman's ability to speak out about her crimes, like Ms. Lannert was able to do, allows the woman agency in a retelling of her narrative. Though the interview could be used to misconstrue what the woman is trying to argue, the mere presence of the woman's voice is a positive change from *Snapped*. When *Snapped* does show an interview of the woman almost always that means the woman is not in jail. The woman's innocence usually means that she will not be demonized by the show, so using her interview can help to create sympathy for her within the audience. On the show *Women Behind Bars*, the women are, obviously, already behind bars and the focus of the show is to instead tell how the women got there and not how they snapped. While it is not being argued that *Women Behind Bars* is the solution to *Snapped*, it is being asserted that this show incorporates a very important component that *Snapped* blatantly misses: the complex societal, cultural and gender issues that surround a

crime. *Women Behind Bars* understands that a crime cannot be condensed into the before and after of a moment of insanity and that some women who commit crimes, while not completely innocent, are in some way victims themselves.

It is unfortunate that proper audience analysis could not be conducted. The lack of promotion of *Snapped* on Oxygen's website as well as the lack of opportunities for fans to interact posed a detriment to any research that could be conducted and made clear the inappropriateness of virtual ethnography as a method for this project. The use of virtual ethnography could have been useful for other shows on the Oxygen network, but not for *Snapped*. Face to face as well as group interviews would prove beneficial for further research. Future research should analyze audience readings of the show to see if the show is being interpreted. Questions regarding audience members' thoughts on female felons as well as female deviance would be valuable in understanding the kind of impact *Snapped* has.

Even if future audience analysis proves to be somewhat positive, this researcher would like to caution readers from thinking that the show does not pose as much of a societal danger as it has been accused of. *Snapped* distorts a very serious reality and diverts attention from the real issue: women dying at the hands of a significant other. It is sensationalized murders that get the attention, but society needs to focus on a very real problem. A recent article entitled "Terrorism and Domestic Violence in America" illustrated this issue best:

Two recent fatal shootings, one of late term abortion doctor George Tiller as he attended church services in Wichita, Kansas, and the other of security guard Stephen Tyrone Johns on duty at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in

Washington, D.C., have sparked a blitzkrieg of media coverage, but it was another story reported by the Associated Press that caught my attention. It didn't create much of a splash, but I found it more deeply disturbing and compelling than these shootings. This was a case involving not terrorism, but domestic violence, a scourge that is far more virulent and deadly in this country, but gets relatively scant attention. This lack of attention is similar to the curious media tendency to obsess over al Qaeda, while ignoring ordinary crime, a far more pervasive and dangerous threat to national security (Krauss, 2009 para. 1).

It is the terms that are used to frame these issues that make them so important. Every day there are stories about car bombings in Iraq or Afghanistan and every so often we hear about another domestic terrorist plot that has been foiled by the government. This is what America's attention is focused on. Now, one can argue that the sheer magnitude of domestic violence cases makes it impossible for the news to cover stories of abuse; that news stories like this would inundate audiences with names and faces that would overwhelm them. In fact, it would be best to introduce audiences to stories like this in a weekly format, the kind of format that *Snapped* is using. *Snapped* has an opportunity to refocus societal attention on a very pressing issue. *Snapped* could use its platform to truly bring awareness to an issue that is not on the radar of the American consciousness. If not a network for women, by women, then who will speak up for these women in danger? Why could *Snapped* not showcase abuse survivors as it tried to do earlier on? *Snapped* was still highly rated when these few episodes aired, so why not show women surviving abuse? It is not as though *Snapped* is lacking in women to cover for their show:

In 2001, for example, nearly 600,000 women were assaulted in the United States by their intimate partners - husbands, boyfriends, cohabitants, friends. Of these assaults, 42,000 were for rape, 44,000 for robbery, and 81,000 for serious beatings. In addition, 1247 women were murdered. That's the ugly, shocking truth, the insidious secret that families kept to themselves until the 1970s. Think about that. Nearly 600,000 separate incidents of horrific violence committed against women every single year. Millions of women in total, bruised and battered and mortally afraid that it will happen again, are subjected to a living hell while the legal system fails to protect them unless the offenders are behind bars. (Krauss, 2010 para. 1)

Yes, the women on *Snapped* do exist, but their numbers are so small and abused women's numbers are so large, that it seems ludicrous to focus on something so minute. It is this essayist's hope that one day the true victims are recognized and given the help they need. If there is anything to walk away with from this project it is that attention that is given to some women not only hurts women through the stereotypes it plays on but it also hurts the women that attention is not given to. Three women die every single because of domestic violence and we turn a blind eye to it. Women, and society as well, need to "snap" out of our denial of such things and focus our attention on the real problems in our world.

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