The (Mis)Representation of Queer Lives in True Crime

Edited by Abbie E. Goldberg, Danielle C. Slakoff, and Carrie L. Buist

ROUTLEDGE

THE (MIS)REPRESENTATION OF QUEER LIVES IN TRUE CRIME

This book examines the representation and misrepresentation of queer people in true crime, addressing their status as both victims and perpetrators in actual crime, as well as how the media portrays them.

The chapters apply an intersectional perspective in examining criminal cases involving LGBTQ people, as well as the true crime media content surrounding the cases. The book illuminates how sexual orientation, gender, race, and other social locations impact the treatment of queer people in the criminal legal system and the mass media. Each chapter describes one or more high-profile criminal cases involving queer people (e.g., the murders of Brandon Teena and Kitty Genovese; serial killer Aileen Wuornos; the Pulse nightclub mass shooting). The authors examine how the cases are portrayed in the media via news, films, podcasts, documentaries, books, social media, and more. Each chapter discusses not only what is visible or emphasized by the media but also what is invisible in the accounting or societal focus surrounding the case. Lesser-known (but similar) cases are used in the book to call attention to how race, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, social class, and/or other features influence the dominant narrative surrounding these cases. Each chapter addresses “teachable moments” from each case and its coverage, leaving readers with several considerations to take with them into the future.

The book also provides media resources and supplemental materials so that curious readers, including scholars, students, content creators, and advocates, can examine the cases and media content further. The book will appeal to scholars and students of criminology, psychology, sociology, law, media studies, sexuality studies, and cultural studies and people with an interest in true crime.

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INTRODUCTION

Toward a Critical Examination of LGBTQ+ True Crime

Danielle C. Slakoff, Carrie Buist, and Abbie E. Goldberg

Introduction

True crime is an "occasionally controversial multi-platform genre that is most often associated with murder narratives and shares some common ancestral heritage with journalism, but always has been driven by different impulses" (Punnett, 2018, p. 3). True crime narratives are typically based on "true events" but are shaped by the teller and their own values; true crime content can be textual, visual, and/or oral. Some true crime content sticks closer to factual events and is more "documentary" focused, potentially with an advocacy or educational bend, whereas other manifestations of true crime can best be described as sensationalistic and emotionally charged storytelling for entertainment. Put simply, true crime content uses real cases to entertain consumers (Horeck, 2019).

The true crime genre has existed in various formats over the last 400 years (Burger, 2016) but is currently having a cultural moment (Horeck, 2019). Over half of Americans say they like the true crime genre (Orth, 2022), and the number of true crime titles has exploded on popular streaming sites and services (Packer, 2021; Rascoe & Estrada, 2022). True crime content shifts with larger cultural shifts (Horeck, 2019), as do critiques associated with it. As scholars, cultural critics, and content creators have pointed out (e.g., Durham et al., 1995; Green, 2020; Rosner, 2021), the crimes that receive the most coverage are those committed by (and often against) White, middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual people. Particularly absent from the true crime landscape has been a nuanced analysis of crimes involving LGBTQ+ people—and how queer victims and perpetrators are portrayed in the media.

This volume recognizes and builds upon the accelerating and persistent cultural fascination with true crime but assumes a fresh academic perspective on the topic. Indeed, this volume focuses specifically on LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning; also referred to as "queer" in this volume) people and crime. According to national data sources, LGBTQ+ people make up about 7% of the

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population in the U.S. (Jones, 2022), and issues facing LGBTQ+ people have become the subject of increasing scholarly attention, including within the fields of criminology and criminal justice. For example, in the past decade, we have witnessed the growth of the subfield of *queer criminology*, which seeks to examine queer people's experiences in the criminal legal system, including those of victims, perpetrators, and professionals in the field (Buist & Lenning, 2016). However, critical exploration of how LGBTQ+ people are represented in the media as victims, perpetrators, or practitioners is still fairly new—as such, an examination of LGBTQ+ people within true crime content is much needed. Past research shows that media portrayals can inform public attitudes about particular issues (Gross & Aday, 2003) and play an important role in reaffirming stereotypes (Slakoff, 2020). In this volume, media representations (or misrepresentations) of queer folks are centered, as well as what is made visible and invisible in such portrayals.

The chapters within this collection take a critical look at true crime content involving LGBTQ+ people. A particularly important feature of the volume is the authors' use of an intersectional perspective in examining criminal cases involving LGBTQ+ people. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995), refers to the idea that all people experience life along multiple intersecting axes based on their various identities. Each person's unique identities can result in intersecting and compounding forms of oppression and inequality (Gillborn, 2015). For example, a White queer woman and a Black queer woman may experience life and inequality differently, despite their similarities. In turn, across this edited volume, authors discuss how queer folks' various identities shape their experiences with the criminal legal system and the mass media. In doing so, the authors name and discuss deep-seated issues within society, such as racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia.

The Importance of This Volume

Across this volume, authors engage with true crime and mass media focused on LGBTQ+ people, laying bare the complex issues that queer folks face in the media, in the criminal legal system, and within society. Although we have continued to see progress in the fight for queer people's civil and human rights, there is still, unfortunately, much work left to do.

Indeed, in recent years, queer folks have been under literal and legislative attack within the U.S. and abroad. The Pulse and Club Q mass shootings and the high rate at which trans women are killed in the U.S. are but three examples of LGBTQ+ folks being targeted for violence. In the U.S., it was not until 2015 that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled same-sex couples had the right to marry. In recent years, so-called "bathroom bills"—which were written to keep trans and nonbinary folks from using public restrooms—have been introduced in state legislatures (and, thus far, have failed to become law). According to the Williams Institute (2020), nearly half of all LGBTQ+ folks lack protection from discrimination in employment, education, housing, public accommodations, and credit within the U.S.

In addition, careful attention to how LGBTQ+ people are portrayed in a variety of media suggests that stereotypes and negative portrayals of queer people persist. For example, depictions of LGBTQ+ perpetrators frequently highlight their sexuality or gender identity in newspaper headlines, even when irrelevant to the crime committed

or the nature of the victims (e.g., Hunter, 2022; Nadrich, 2017). Trans people are often portrayed as deceptive within the media (Konigsberg, 1995), and societal factors (e.g., transphobia, racism) may be downplayed or altogether missing when discussing LGBTQ+ victims. These portrayals reflect and reify dominant stereotypes of LGBTQ+ people, such as ideas that LGBTQ+ people are mentally ill or deserve the harm that comes to them. As co-editors, we believe that a critical examination of queer people's media portrayals can help us further understand how harmful stereotypes persist. Dominant media narratives can impact how jury members, policy makers, and the general public view LGBTQ+ people—and for this reason, an examination of how queer folks are portrayed in true crime is both timely and necessary.

Book Structure

When we began this journey as co-editors, our goal was to help curate an accessible and multi-disciplinary collection that addresses the intersection of LGBTQ+ people and crime, and attends in particular to the media's treatment of LGBTQ+ folks. We are proud of the diverse coalition of authors and topics we have brought together in this book. The authors represent a variety of academic disciplines and examine a wide array of true crime and media content from various lenses. The chapters in this book are thought-provoking and powerful, and draw connections between the media's treatment of queer folks and societal shifts in the treatment of LGBTQ+ people by institutions and structures (e.g., changes in hate crime legislation).

The chapters within this volume have the same general format. Each chapter describes one or more high-profile criminal cases involving queer people (e.g., the murders of Brandon Teena and Kitty Genovese; serial killer Aileen Wuornos; the Pulse nightclub mass shooting). The authors examined how the cases were portrayed in the media via news, film, podcasts, documentaries, books, social media, and more. Each chapter discusses not only what is visible or emphasized by the media but also what is invisible in the accounting or societal focus surrounding the case. In this way, lesser-known (but similar) cases are often used by authors to call attention to how race, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, social class, and/or other features influence the dominant narrative surrounding these cases. Each chapter addresses "teachable moments" from each case and its coverage, leaving readers with several considerations to take with them into the future. The chapters also provide media resources and supplemental materials so that curious readers, including scholars, students, content creators, and advocates, can examine the cases and media content further if they choose to do so.

Part I of the volume comprises chapters examining the portrayal of LGBTQ+ folks as *perpetrators of crime*. In Chapter 2, Stacie Merken and Lauren Moton use two cases of lesbian serial killers—Aileen Wuornos and a serial killing pair, Gwendolyn Graham and Cathy Wood—to examine how lesbian women who kill are portrayed in the media—and how those portrayals may ultimately impact the criminal legal system. They further discuss how the killers' personal histories of abuse and trauma were minimized within media accounts. In Chapter 3, Brian J. Frederick describes several queer male serial killers, arguing that an examination of the killers' queerness is often missing from a consideration of these cases. Further, the author discusses the sensationalism often present in stories about queer male serial killers.

In Chapter 4, Jason A. Brown, Brandon Golob, and Bruno Araujo discuss how bisexuality continues to be associated with dangerousness within true crime, which serves to perpetuate biphobia. In the chapter, the authors use films such as *Basic Instinct* and *Blue Velvet* and the hit documentary *The Staircase* to illustrate biphobic themes present in stories about bisexual people. In Chapter 5, Emily Lenning and Xavier Guadalupe-Diaz explore the common themes present in fictional and "true" crime depictions of trans perpetrators. Using *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Psycho*, and the book *Troubled Blood*, they describe how the "terroristic tranny" stereotype has persisted in the horror and thriller genres.

Part II of the volume consists of chapters that center LGBTQ+ folks as *victims of crime*, or as victims of the criminal legal system, again with attention to media portrayals of LGBTQ+ victims. In Chapter 6, W. Carsten Andresen describes how the so-called Gay Panic Defense was used in the infamous *Jenny Jones Show* murder trial, having a massive influence on "gay panic defenses" thereafter. In Chapter 7, Valena Beety describes how the media seizes upon outdated tropes of queer people as being dangerous and deviant to portray queer folks as perpetrators. Using the cases of the San Antonio Four and of Leigh Stubbs and Tami Vance, Beety demonstrates how homophobia, gender bias, and false evidence can coalesce to cause wrongful convictions.

In Chapter 8, Jordan Blair Woods examines the media coverage of the Matthew Shepard murder, almost 25 years after the brutal killing. Woods uses an intersectional and queer criminological lens to examine how tragic events such as Shepard's killing are remembered in the public domain. Further, the author describes how Shepard's killing later impacted hate crime legislation. In Chapter 9, Shanna N. Felix and Merideth Garcia describe how the death of Kitty Genovese—now synonymous with the bystander effect—is a strong example of queer people's erasure. Indeed, Kitty's queer identity, until very recently, had been left out of the story of her death. The authors note the lack of true crime media attention provided to queer women victims and use two hate crimes—the deaths of Rebecca Wright and Sakia Gunn—to further illustrate intersectional issues in media attention of queer women.

In Chapter 10, Christina DeJong, Max Osborn, and Harnoor Kaur examine how true crime podcasts portray the murders of two trans women, Gwen Araujo and Islan Nettles. In both cases, their murderers tried to use a "trans panic" defense. Across podcasts, the content creators served to educate the public about issues trans folks face and advocated for severe punishments for those who harm trans people. In Chapter 11, Max Osborn examines how trans men who are victimized are portrayed in the media and argues that trans men are still very much missing from media portrayals of LGBTQ+ victims. Using the deaths of Brandon Teena, Kayden Clarke, and Tony McDade as examples, the author examines how all three men were portrayed as irritational and predatory. Indeed, victim-blaming was common across their portrayals.

In Chapter 12, Jean-Anne Sutherland analyzes the media portrayal of Latisha King's death at the hands of their 14-year-old classmate in the documentary *Valentine Road* and in other media. In examining the media portrayals of Latisha's death, the author makes broader connections to queer youth's experiences with bullying within our school systems and how discriminatory laws in Florida harm the larger LGBTQ+ community.

In Part III of this volume, the authors move beyond considering LGBTQ+ people as individuals to consider their *relationships with partners, families, communities, and the criminal legal system*, all with particular attention to their intersectional identities in context. Among the important topics discussed are domestic violence, immigration, mass shootings, and the criminalization of people's identities.

In Chapter 13, Carrie Teresa and Dana Radatz examine the New Jersey Four case through an intersectional lens, describing how the media portrayed seven young Black lesbian women as a "wolf pack" and a "gang." The authors argue that this racist framing was reminiscent of how the Central Park 5 case was treated by the media (and the criminal legal system) years prior. They further argue that the New Jersey 4 case serves as a foundation to understand the criminalization of Black people, the fight for LGBTQ+ rights, and how biased media can negatively impact people's due process rights.

In Chapter 14, Nicole L. Johnson and Autumn M. Bermea describe how LGBTQ+ folks are at high risk of intimate partner violence (IPV) and discuss some of the unique forms of IPV queer folks may face. By examining the media portrayals of the murders of Annamarie Cochrane Rintala, Yuni Carey Herrera, and Stephen Sylvester at the hands of their intimate partners, the authors explore how IPV in queer relationships is portrayed across media and true crime.

In Chapter 15, Abbie E. Goldberg examines a tragic case of murder-suicide and family violence, colloquially referred to as the Hart Family Murders. In this case, a White lesbian couple adopted six Black children. Ultimately, one of the mothers drove their SUV off a cliff with the entire family aboard, killing them all. This case is explored through the lenses of intersectionality, intimate partner violence, transracial adoption, and White saviorism—and describes how the child welfare system was ultimately unsuccessful in saving the six children, despite multiple reports of abuse.

In Chapter 16, Adrian Copeland, LaQuana N. Askew, and Carrie L. Buist describe the high rates of sexual violence against queer people and illustrate the history of biased laws (and media attention) which served to criminalize LGBTQ+ folks. The authors masterfully communicate how these biased laws and representations serve to harm the queer community broadly and within the criminal legal system.

In Chapter 17, Autumn M. Bermea examines the media coverage surrounding the Pulse nightclub shooting, noting that many of the victims' Latinx identities were notably absent from media attention surrounding the mass shooting. The chapter also describes how the media often published unsubstantiated rumors about the shooter's possible (never confirmed) identity as a queer man and noted that the nightclub itself was often portrayed as a safe haven for the queer community.

In Chapter 18, April Carrillo examines how trans women housed in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities are portrayed via the media. These women often traveled to the U.S. in order to escape the violence they experienced within their home countries. The author observes that the deaths of trans women in (or immediately after) detention received far more media attention than trans women's experiences in detention broadly, lending credence to the "if it bleeds, it leads" mentality of media coverage.

While we recognize that this volume is not exhaustive in its focus, we strongly believe that this unique collection provides readers—including scholars, students, media critics, and anyone with a genuine interest in "true crime"—with important insights and

tools that they can apply to their lives and media consumption. Indeed, we expect that readers will become more sophisticated and thoughtful media critics as they consider and apply the "lessons learned" from this volume. Further, many authors within the volume challenge readers to examine the ethics surrounding true crime content, an emerging concern in the true crime space (see Slakoff et al., 2022). We encourage readers to always consider the human beings at the center of these stories, who are so often minimized. Our hope is that readers will gain a deep sense of how far the media (and society) has come in their portrayal of queer folks but also how far they still have left to go.

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PART I

LGBTQ People as Perpetrators

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2

LUCK BE A LADY

Misrepresentations of Lesbian Serial Killers in the Media

Stacie Merken and Lauren Moton

Introduction

> Wuornos … confuses our perceptions of *real* female serial killers by not only being a lesbian, but by being a particular *type* of lesbian. She was not the pretty and feminine *L Word* lipstick lesbian, but a hard-edged dyke type, oozing a beefy, drunken-stoned, sloppy kind of masculine knucklehead violence we typically associate with males. As a serial killer, it is easier to correlate Wuornos's violence with an overabundance of the masculine rather than with any intrinsic femininity gone awry.
>
> *(Vronksy, 2007, p. 5)*

Media portrayals can have tangible effects on the groups being depicted. Representation in the media provides role models and a sense of community for audience members who relate to the portrayal (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011), particularly so for marginalized groups, including the LGBTQIA+ (or queer[1]) community. Although the inclusivity of queer people in the media has increased, the media still leaves room for misrepresentation, causing negative impacts on an already-marginalized community. In the above quote of female serial killers (FSKs), Vronsky (2007) illustrates the social construction of gender[2] by characterizing the serial violence of a queer woman—like Aileen Wuornos—as masculine. Masculinity,[3] or having masculine traits, is a common stereotype applied to queer women and is understood as socially constructed whereby behaviors considered masculine are largely influenced by both cultural and social factors (Wharton, 2005). Perceptions of sexuality stereotypes are often acquired through interactions with family members, peers, educators, and mass media. Specifically, pop culture and media contribute to the solidification of these stereotypes (Stangor, 2000).

Additionally, for people in the LGBTQIA+ community, factors contributing to stereotypes about their sexuality can be influenced by their other intersecting social identities (e.g., race, ability, and gender presentation) that may compound negative views of a queer individual or group. For example, a Black woman may be stereotyped in

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society as the "angry Black woman" trope where it is assumed she is aggressive, difficult, and hyper-masculine. Black women have historically been labeled as more aggressive and masculine than White women (Kwate & Threadcraft, 2015). For a Black lesbian woman, adding a lesbian identity to an already-marginalized race compounds both racial and sexuality stereotypes, further contributing to the notion of hypermasculinization (Woolner, 2015). To analyze lesbian serial killers in the media—who often have complex and intersecting identities that impact their experiences—intersectionality serves as a useful lens to interrogate their depictions. Developed by Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality examines how society responds to individuals occupying multiple social and political identities and how those identities intersect to produce different modes of privilege and oppression. An intersectionality framework is helpful for exploring the unique social positionality of people who possess multiple marginalized identities.

This chapter explores media portrayals of lesbian women serial killers through analysis of the cases of Aileen Wuornos and the serial killer pair Gwendolyn Graham and Cathy Wood. Intersectionality, social construction of gender, feminist pathways perspective, and evil woman vs. chivalry hypotheses are employed to examine the misrepresentation of lesbian serial killers in the media. We argue that these images exacerbate long-held stereotypes of lesbian women as masculine, man-hating, and/or lacking a nurturing disposition, and fail to consider the role of childhood polyvictimization.[4] Additionally, the negative depictions of lesbian women contribute to assumptions and perceptions of them in the public sphere, which ultimately impact and reflect the representation of these populations in our criminal legal system. Pervasive stereotypes of certain groups can trickle down into micro-level interactions with criminal legal actors (e.g., law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges) that can perpetuate hyper-criminalization and violence toward the queer community (Moton et al., 2020).

Little is known about queer woman serial killers and their subsequent portrayal in the media. Assumptions are often made about their sexuality in the media based on the nature of their crime and their interpersonal relationships. According to Vronsky (2007), roughly 16% (one in six) of all serial killers caught in the United States since 1820 are female—either solo or partnered with a man or woman. It should be noted that it is unclear as to how many of these women identify as LGBTQIA+ because evidence of a same-gender relationship alone does not indicate queer identity. Therefore, in the two cases that were selected for analysis, all women have publicly self-identified as lesbian or queer.

The Case of Aileen (Lee) Wuornos: The "Monster"

Aileen Wuornos, affectionately called "Lee," was born on February 29, 1956, to Diane Wuornos, a young teenager, and Leo Pittman, a 19-year-old handyman. Leo was known as a sexual predator toward young children; hence, the marriage was short-lived. Diane was left alone to raise Lee and her older brother Keith (Wuornos & Barry-Dee, 2006). Lee never met her father due to his incarceration for kidnapping and raping a 7-year-old girl, and he subsequently died by suicide in prison in 1971. Motherhood was seemingly too much for Diane, and she left her 4-year-old daughter Lee and son Keith with her parents, her father Lauri and mother Eileen (Britta) Wuornos, who adopted both Lee

and Keith. In later interviews with Christopher Berry-Dee,[5] Lee described the abuse she endured at the hands of her grandfather Lauri, where he forced her to strip naked, tying her to a bed or bending her over a kitchen table while screaming that Lee was worthless, was a mistake, and "should never have been born" (Myers et al., 2005; Newton, 2000; Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006, p. 6). Following a drunken confession by Lee's brother Keith, classmates confirmed that Lee and Keith had an incestuous sexual relationship. Lee was also used for sexual pleasure in exchange for cigarettes by the boys at school and soon became known as "The Cigarette Pig" or "Cigarette Bandit" (Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006, p. 7). One could argue this was Lee's first experimentation with sex work and an early experience that illustrates her misperception of love for sex.

At 11 years old, Lee learned the truth about her biological parents, which may have led to explosive outbursts in her early teens. She became pregnant at 14, claiming Lauri, Keith, or one of Lauri's friends was the father. Sent to a home for unwed mothers, Lee gave birth to a boy in January 1971, who was placed for adoption, and the two never reconnected again (Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006). In 1974, while using one of her aliases, Lee was arrested and jailed in Colorado for drunk driving, firing a .22 caliber pistol from a moving car, and disorderly conduct (Merken, 2016; Newton, 2000). Skipping bail, Lee continued hitchhiking and was picked up by Lewis Gratz Fell, a 69-year-old millionaire, whom she married at age 20 in 1976. The marriage did not last as Lee punched Fell after he called her a "trick," resulting in her guilty plea to an assault-and-battery charge. After obtaining a restraining order, Fell filed for an annulment, leading to divorce in 1977. Over the next several years, Lee engaged in hitchhiking, sex work, failed relationships, and criminal activities like robbery, forgery, and motor vehicle theft. She spent approximately 1 year in prison; however, her life changed in 1986 when she met 24-year-old Tyria "Ty" Moore, at the Zodiac Bar in South Daytona, Florida (Merken, 2016).

Seeing an opportunity to start over, Lee told Ty she owned a steam cleaning business and did not mention her involvement in the sex trade. At the time, Ty lived with her friend, Cammie Greene, and Greene's husband. After spending time at the Greene home, Cammie became suspicious of Lee, finding condoms and men's business cards in Lee's suitcase, prompting the Greenes to kick Ty out of their home. As a born-again Christian, Ty struggled with her love for Lee, but the two stayed together, living in a motel, and crashing on friends' couches for approximately 4 years. Although Lee preferred sex with men (Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006), she found a deep emotional bond with Ty, taking on the caregiver role by picking up more "Johns" (i.e., sex work clients) to make money to support them.

Lee's life took a drastic turn in 1989 after crossing paths with Richard Mallory, a 51-year-old owner of an electronics repair business. Mallory was a paranoid and private man, having spent 10 years in a state mental institution in Maryland for attempted rape—prior to meeting Lee and unbeknownst to the jury in Lee's future trial (Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006). While intoxicated, he engaged in violent sexual fantasies, often using sex workers to assert power by biting, beating, and handcuffing them. The last day anyone saw Mallory alive was November 30, 1989; his car was found the next day on December 1, and his body was found two weeks later (Merken, 2016; Newton, 2000). Police initially suspected a robbery gone wrong because Mallory was shot three times by what appeared to be a .22 caliber pistol. However, from June to July 1990, the

bodies of David Spears, Charles Carskaddon, Eugene "Troy" Burress, Charles "Dick" Humphreys, and Walter Antonio were found shot to death with ballistics, confirming all men were killed with a similar gun. Additionally, the car of Peter Siems (his body was never found) was discovered with a bloody handprint, and witnesses stated two women—a blonde and a brunette—fled the scene in a vehicle. All victims were White men, with ages ranging from 40 to 62 (Merken, 2016). Due to extensive media coverage of the murders, police were forced to conclude there was a connection between the killings, noting that a possible serial killer was responsible.

By December 1990, police searched multiple hotels, finding receipts linking to various aliases: Cammie Greene, Lee Blahovec, and Lori Grady. Fingerprint analysis of the bloody handprint left on Siems's car, the description of the blonde and brunette women given by witnesses, pawned items such as Mallory's camera, and the aliases used by Lee, all led police to Wuornos. On January 9, 1991, police arrested Wuornos at the Last Resort biker bar. Ty was promised immunity for cooperation with police and demonstration of no involvement in the murders; therefore, she spoke with Lee via telephone, which was tapped by police to gain information. The love Lee had for Ty was undeniable, and, sensing a deal was made, Lee stated during the call that Ty was not involved with the murders (Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006). Lee confessed and was tried separately for each murder, claiming self-defense. Although warned not to testify by her attorneys, Lee wanted the jury to hear that Mallory had victimized her (Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006). During her testimony, Lee explained the brutal rape, sodomy, torture, and beating she experienced, forcing her to shoot Mallory when her life was threatened. However, as the only witness, *and* due to the lack of evidence about Mallory's prior attempted rape withheld from the jury, Lee was found guilty. Her highly publicized comments in response to the jury and Judge Blount, stating "I'm innocent! I was raped! I hope you get raped! Scumbags of America!" stayed in the minds of the jurors the next day during the penalty phase[6] of the trial (Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006, p. 201). Although expert witnesses presented mitigating factors—Lee struggled with mental illness, had a borderline personality disorder,[7] and suffered from polyvictimization—the jury voted unanimously for a recommended death sentence, confirmed by Judge Blount on January 31, 1992. Lee pled no contest for the murders of David Spears, Dick Humphreys, and Eugene Burress, resulting in three more death sentences.

In November 1992, a reporter uncovered information pertaining to Mallory's conviction of a violent and brutal rape in another state, prompting Lee and her defense attorneys to appeal unsuccessfully for approximately 10 years (Merken, 2016; Newton, 2000; Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006). On Wednesday, October 9, 2002, before her execution, Lee's last words to the witnesses were: "I'd just like to say I'm sailing with the Rock and I'll be back like Independence Day with Jesus, June 6, like the movie, big mothership and all. I'll be back"[8] (Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006, p. 213). Lee was pronounced dead at 9:47 am, with her ashes scattered in a secret location in Michigan.

It is important to examine Aileen's life and subsequent death through an intersectional lens. Wuornos was a White cisgender woman. Certain role expectations (e.g., passive, docile, and dependent) are associated with the White woman identity (Landrine, 1985), as well as compliance with the patriarchy and emphasized femininity (Schippers, 2007). Wuornos lacked all of these characteristics in the public eye, and, arguably, the violation of these societal expectations prompted a punitive response. In addition to her

gender and racial identities, Wuornos was from a low-income upbringing, queer, and a sex worker, and had possible prominent mental health issues. The intersection of her identities contributed to an image of someone outside the bounds of "normal" society, and it may have become easy to dismiss and dehumanize her from the perspective of the media and the criminal legal system.

The Case of Gwen and Cathy: "Lethal Lovers"

A lesser-known case used for comparison to Aileen Wuornos is that of the serial killer pair, Gwendolyn "Gwen" Graham and Cathy Wood. These two White women were known as the "Lethal Lovers," convicted of five murders of elderly women at the Alpine Manor nursing home in 1987 while both worked as nurse's aides at the residential facility. Similar to Lee, both women's life stories are fraught with polyvictimization. Gwen was born in California in 1963 but grew up on a farm in Tyler, Texas, and was often forced to watch her abusive father slaughter animals at a young age. If she refused, he would put Gwen's head in the toilet and flush several times (Newton, 2000). As a teen, she would burn herself with lit cigarettes as a coping mechanism for her father's abuse. Graham later stated that as a child she also experienced sexual abuse at the hands of her father (Newton, 2000). Although this allegation was never substantiated as her father denied the claim, if true, it is feasible that the combination of these traumatic experiences may have set Graham on a path that contributed to her offending.

Cathy Wood grew up in a suburb outside of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her father was reportedly an emotionally distant man who abused alcohol, while her mother was viewed as domineering, extremely conservative, and judgmental. Cathy rarely received love or attention, often feeling neglected and judged by her parents and peers. This was in part due to her weight as she was considered chronically and severely overweight at 450 pounds (Newton, 2000). Cathy's first relationship was with a girl named Debbie—but the two lied to Cathy's parents, stating that Debbie was "David," requiring Debbie to dress in masculine clothing so that it would appear that Cathy was dating a boy. Cathy's mom caught them in the lie and threatened to put Cathy in a psychiatric institution if she ever saw Debbie again (Newton, 2000). Her mother's homophobia, her father's neglect and alcoholism, and the abrupt conclusion to her first romantic relationship negatively impacted Wood as she grew older and established new relationships.

In 1986, Graham went to work at the Alpine Manor nursing home at age 22. There, she met Wood, a fellow aide, and they developed a romantic relationship over the course of several months. The motive for the murders they committed has been described as carrying out a "love bond" to prove their dedication to one another (Ramsland, 2007). Of note is that the details that were shared with the public about the murders at Alpine Manor were primarily based on Wood's accounts of the crimes in discussions with authorities. The first murder of Marguerite Chambers, an elderly woman with Alzheimer's disease, occurred in January 1987. Graham smothered her with a cloth while Wood watched for onlookers (Cauffiel, 1992). Authorities presumed Chambers' death was from natural causes, so no autopsy was performed. Wood claims that Graham murdered four more patients at the Alpine Manor home. The victims' ages ranged from 65 to 97, and all suffered from Alzheimer's disease (Cauffiel, 1992; Ramsland, 2007). Of note is that the race of the victims was not reported in the media.

During the trial, Wood testified that the murders were part of a game by configuring letters of the victim's first names to spell out M-U-R-D-E-R. However, due to difficulty finding patients to satisfy the sequence, they switched to counting each murder as a "day," for example, using the phrase, "I love you forever and a day." Brought into evidence was a poem that Wood wrote to Graham with the phrase "You'll be mine forever and five days" (Newton, 2000). Graham and Wood ended their relationship when Graham began dating a different Alpine Manor nurse's aide, Heather Baragar. Eventually, Graham and Baragar moved to Texas to work in a hospital for infants (Cauffiel, 1992; Newton, 2000). The murder investigation commenced when Wood revealed the details of the Alpine Manor murders to her ex-husband. Two of the victims' bodies were exhumed because they had not been cremated. Although no physical evidence of homicide was found after autopsies were performed (which is not unusual in smothering cases), the medical examiner ruled both cases a homicide due to the confession given by Wood (Newton, 2000).

Graham and Wood were apprehended in early December 1988 (Associated Press, 1988), and both were charged for two of the murders, with Wood receiving a reduced sentence through a plea deal. Wood told the prosecution that Graham was the mastermind, while describing herself as a "pawn," serving as a lookout/distraction to supervisors while Graham perpetrated the murders. Cathy Wood further stated that Graham was sexually, physically, and emotionally domineering (Cauffiel, 1992; Newton, 2000). Graham maintained her innocence, asserting Wood devised the murders as an elaborate mind-game to ensure Graham would never leave her. The jury came to a conviction based upon the testimony provided by Graham's girlfriend, Heather Baragar, who revealed Graham had confessed to five murders (Cauffiel, 1992; Newton, 2000). Gwendolyn Graham was found guilty of five counts of murder and one count of conspiracy to commit murder, receiving six life sentences without the possibility of parole (Ramsland, 2007). Cathy Wood was charged with one count of second-degree murder and one count of conspiracy to commit second-degree murder and sentenced to a total of 40 years. Wood became eligible for parole on March 5, 2005, was released from prison on January 16, 2020, and currently resides with her relatives in South Carolina (Paine, 2020).

Many questions remain regarding the motivation for such heinous crimes and what role the women's various identities and experiences play in them. Feminist pathways serve as a fertile ground to theorize about correlates of crime (Belknap, 2010). This perspective centers on gender and posits that victimization throughout the life course can be assessed as an important risk factor for women's offending (Cauffman, 2008). For example, physical and sexual abuse are common indicators associated with criminal offending among women (DeHart, 2008), which is reflective of the 80% of incarcerated women in the United States having experienced physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime (Britton, 2011). The trauma and polyvictimization Aileen Wuornos, Gwendolyn Graham, and Cathy Wood experienced as children may have led to their high risk of offending and subsequent criminal behavior.

Queer pathways are another critical perspective that can assist in contextualizing Graham, Wood, and Wuornos' criminal behavior. Queer pathways are an emerging framework that can be used to identify unique life course experiences that lead to criminal offending. According to Asquith and colleagues (2017), queer criminal careers can

be attributed to two processes: Social exclusion because of sexuality and gender identity and hyper-criminalization due to the construction and application of cis-heteronormative laws and criminal legal practices (Asquith et al., 2017; Winters, 2022). All three women experienced social exclusion either from their families or peers due to their sexuality across their life course. Further, Wuornos experienced frequent differential application of the law when men would sexually assault her during her time in the sex trade and yet she was often the one criminalized when calling on the police for help. Media portrayals in both cases reinforce the sexuality stereotypes of queer women and do not offer contextualizing details about their experiences with polyvictimization.

Media Portrayals

Monster*: Aileen Wuornos*

Due to the pervasive nature of heteronormativity, the term "lesbian" is often linked with "masculinity," because having an attraction to women is commonly designated as a trait that only men possess. One of the most famous media portrayals of Aileen Wuornos was in the movie *Monster*, written and directed by Patty Jenkins (2003) and starring Charlize Theron in the main role. In a discussion about the search for an actress to play Aileen Wuornos, the director stated,

> It came to finding someone who I thought had the strength to not be afraid to shy away, to not shy away from the fact that she was this incredible, volatile person who crossed the line and did these incredibly horrible things, yet could also sell the vulnerability and the humanity of this person.
>
> *(Jenkins & Theron, 2004, 5 minutes 29 seconds)*

Theron won the trifecta of industry awards for her performance: The Screen Actors Guild Award, Golden Globe, and Academy Award. Notably, in her interviews and speeches, Theron never once addressed the dehumanization and violence sex workers face, the polyvictimization Wuornos experienced, or the stigma of the double deviant[9] social construction of Wuornos–being a queer White woman acting outside of racialized and gendered norms.

The humanization of Wuornos was largely omitted from the film, with the exception of the second scene early on in the movie. In that scene, a voiceover by Theron is used, showing Lee in her pre-teens, lifting her shirt up for boys (Jenkins, 2003). In this scene, the voiceover tells the audience that a pre-teen Wuornos was curious about whether boys liked her; however, she soon realized they were using her for sex. Therefore, she too began to use these exchanges for cigarettes, as the voiceover explains. Pre-teen Wuornos lacks love and attention through her lived experience of violence, neglect, and betrayal. This early onset of sexualized behavior may have contributed to her own understanding of how to engage with men. For audience members unfamiliar with Wuornos's childhood, this brief moment of the film might have the effect of being misconstrued. The movie lacks any scenes of the abuse Lee endured; therefore, without knowing her early life, the audience may assume that the boys' using her for sex was the motive for her adult criminal behavior and not the years of punishment, neglect, incest, and lack of

affection. The mere title immediately sets the stage for a criminal, a violent offender, or a lesbian—with a focus on criminality, not victimization.

To further illustrate Lee's portrayal as a "monster," Theron is "de-beautified" to fit this socially constructed version of a lesbian serial killer. The decision to create a "monster" from Theron could be viewed as an extension of Wuornos's over-masculine appearance in the film. In her role as a manly, beer-drinking sex worker, Theron possessed exaggerated "masculine" movements throughout the entire film. The costumes were "masculine" in nature, dressing Wuornos down and ignoring a whole portion of her previous life. Before Lee became *the* Aileen Wuornos, she was often considered attractive; however, the film does not depict her in this light. The casting of Christina Ricci as Selby based on Tyria "Ty" Moore adds another dimension to the masculinity Theron portrays in the film. Ricci, a petite actress whose physical appearance differed drastically from Ty's real-life appearance, is viewed by the audience as the "woman" in the relationship, simply by her features.

Monster shows a glimpse of Lee as the dominant partner initiating the first kiss and sexual and physical contact and inhabiting the caretaker role as the breadwinner over the course of a nine-month period. The audience, without the knowledge of the polyvictimization Lee experienced, could falsely conclude that the lesbian relationship, and the desire to satisfy her partner's needs, was the impetus for the murder of seven men. Most of the film does not spend much time focusing on Selby's work, failing to show Ty's real-life financial independence, and, therefore, reinforcing Lee as a caregiver. In fact, when the audience first meets Selby, she lives with her parents because she was injured in a car accident, contrary to Ty's real living situation with the Greenes. This false portrayal shows Selby as helpless fodder, not as an independent woman.

Although the film portrays the incident between Mallory and Lee as a brutal rape, *Monster* mainly focuses on Lee's crimes *and* depicts her as nonchalant and apathetic, thus encouraging the audience to lose any plausible sympathy or emotional attachment to the character. The remainder of the film shows sex work as a way to gain money through murder. Pearson (2007) discussed the spatial mobility of Wuornos, portrayed as the hitchhiking serial killer "prostitute." The female hitchhiker or sex worker is more prone to victimization than committing violence (Pearson, 2007); however, this sentiment is reversed in *Monster*—the "prostitute" *is* the killer. Pearson (2007) also described the reversal of roles with Wuornos using the highway, not the traditional street corner, becoming hard to detect as a threat. Therefore, Wuornos, in this role, sheds the feminine "prostitute" image and serves as the masculine "hitchhiker," symbolic of the reversal of gendered norms.

Overall, the predominant focal points of the film involve Lee's hitchhiking and encounters with men, roaming the streets at night like a drifter and criminal, and her proclivity for violence toward men (Seal, 2008). The audience, therefore, sees the "monster" within Wuornos develop almost immediately after the encounter with Mallory. There is no acknowledgment of the sexual, physical, and psychological abuse experienced, the lack of loving parents, the mental illness, and counseling needed—all factors that may have contributed to her future actions.

Aileen Wuornos: American Boogeywoman

Aileen Wuornos: American Boogeywoman, directed by Daniel Farrands (2021), is based on Aileen's biography (Wuornos & Berry-Dee, 2006), with added fictional elements.

The film, set in 1976, depicts Aileen's early life prior to the murders. Described as the "Hooker from Hell" and contrary to the two previous media depictions, Wuornos is portrayed as a young, beautiful woman looking to escape her troubled past by moving away from Michigan down South to Florida. The film focuses on Lee's marriage to an elderly Lewis Fell and the harm she causes to her new family and Florida's high society, emphasizing her seemingly pathological nature. She proceeds to swindle Fell out of his money and estate, and once Fell's daughter Jennifer gets a sense of Aileen's plan, Wuornos goes on a murderous rampage.

This depiction of Lee in the movie portrays a dichotomy: First, she is gorgeous, charismatic, and seductive (the opposite of *Monster*), and, second, the familiar narrative of a psychopath using men to get what she wants through lying, cheating, and stealing. Lee is portrayed as violent and physically strong, getting into trouble with the law through fights with much larger men at local bar establishments. This depiction shows Lee in an almost rabid and inhuman nature when she feels wronged. The film briefly touches on the several men who attempt to sexually assault her, and when she retaliates, the (male) police are often called, not taking her claims of assault seriously. Wuornos is always the one who is punished for defending herself. These scenes contribute to the "man-hating" stereotype often placed on lesbian women (Scharff, 2016; see also Chapter 7, this volume).

An important consideration of this portrayal is the complete omission of Lee's queer identity, thus promoting the invisibility of such a large aspect of her lived experience. There is only one instance that *may* allude to her queer identity in a scene with Fell's daughter, Jennifer. At the end of the film, after Wuornos believes she has drowned Jennifer in the pool, Lee holds Jennifer's lifeless body lovingly and then kisses her on the lips. This vague instance of attraction designated for a woman (as Wuornos is often portrayed as violent and angry toward men) may hint at some level of queer identity. However, if this is the director's attempt at inserting Lee's real-life queer identity into a brief, singular moment, there are important implications of this choice. Wuornos kisses Jennifer's assumed dead body, conveying to the audience that she possesses some sort of twisted attraction to Jennifer by murdering her. The depiction of being a lesbian and capable of the heinous crimes she perpetrated becomes entangled within her queer narrative, possibly causing audience members to inadvertently associate sick desire with queer attraction.

Fictional and Non-Fictional Portrayals of Gwendolyn Graham and Cathy Wood

American Horror Story: Roanoke

There are very limited portrayals of Graham and Wood's crimes. *American Horror Story: Roanoke* incorporated the first fictional version of Gwendolyn Graham and Cathy Wood in Chapter 2, the second episode of the sixth season, which aired in 2016. This media portrayal renders Wood and Graham's queer identity completely invisible. They are depicted as a distorted and hyper-feminine pair of sisters, named Miranda and Bridget Jane, dressed in low-cut nurse outfits. The duo is seen through a story told by a male character, Dr. Elias Cunningham. The two sisters are shown killing patients in an assisted living facility and selecting victims by first name to spell out the word

"M-U-R-D-E-R." Miranda and Bridget Jane open their own facility, searching for families that are tired of taking care of relatives to attract potential victims. The sisters are depicted as homicidal femme fatales, with their nurse outfits unbuttoned at the top, suggesting a sexy and twisted desire to kill (Minear et al., 2016).

Ryan Murphy's characterization of Graham and Wood as sisters in *Roanoke* is quite different from the actual story. This is particularly interesting given that the primary focal point of Graham and Wood's case is their sexual relationship. The portrayal of sisters rather than lovers omits their queer identity, removing the frequently observed combination of queerness and violence—shifting the narrative away from the demonization of a same-sex relationship. This is a curious choice, seeing that an openly gay man was one of the primary creators of the show (Murphy). Whether the omission of the women's queer identity was an intentional choice is unknown, but it can be considered an outlier when considering prior media renditions of the case.

Oxygen's Killer Couples

A non-fictional depiction of Graham and Wood's relationship and criminal activity occurs in Oxygen's *Killer Couples* season 3 episode 10, "Graham-Wood," which aired on August 10, 2014 (Gross & Mitchell, 2014). This show is an American true crime series—a spinoff of Oxygen's *Snapped*—and depicts couples who have committed crimes together. These portrayals are often demonstrated through reenactments with hired actors to pose as the couples who have committed the crimes. Although these depictions are supposed to reflect non-fictional events, the portrayals are problematic and fraught with stereotyping and bias, which shape how the events are framed. For example, the description of the episode details Graham and Wood as a pair of female serial killers who "turn a nursing home into a hotbed of sex, scandal, and murder." The use of this sexually driven terminology not only captures the reader's attention but also indicates to the viewer that queer sex is inextricably linked to criminal activity.

Aside from the sexualized episode description, the episode goes on to portray Graham and Wood's crimes as they occurred in Alpine Manor. However, the actresses who are cast to depict both Graham and Wood differ significantly from how they appear in real life. Graham's character is depicted as hyper-feminine, and Wood's character is a slim feminine blonde depicted as an innocent bored housewife, swept up into Graham's seductive and twisted game of murder. Both portrayals of these women are a far cry from Graham and Wood's real physical appearances and also from their relationship dynamic. First, the representation of the two women as hyper-feminine may have been a tactic to draw viewers through the lens of the male gaze. The audience may be more inclined to watch the show if they are able to fantasize about two conventionally attractive women killing and sleeping together. Also, similar to other depictions of Graham, Wood, and Wuornos, there is an explicit lack of attention paid to their histories of victimization or analysis of what caused them to originally commit these crimes. These types of one-dimensional representations contribute to stereotypes about queer women's relationships and suggest that women's emotions are so intense, such that when brought together (in a romantic relationship), the result is murder and uncontrollable chaos.

Consequences of Media Portrayals

The lack of nuance that film and show directors give regarding Wuornos, Wood, and Graham's experiences prior to their criminal conduct is salient across both cases. Research drawing from feminist pathways points to a foundation of problematic and criminal behavior later in adolescence and adulthood (Belknap, 2010; Britton, 2011; Cauffman, 2008; DeHart, 2008). Though *Monster* and *Boogeywoman* attempted to pepper in certain traumatic experiences that Lee endured, the directors instead cement the pathological and psychopathic narrative. This may be an intentional choice in order to downplay her trauma to negate any sympathy she may garner from the audience. Further, media portrayals of these women tend to be one-dimensional, demonizing them for the audience's gaze. There appears to be something "sexy" about creating the characters as ruthless and pure evil, with no redeeming qualities. These depictions can be harmful because they may solidify a false perception of queer women and their relationships as pathological in their desires. Harmful narratives around marginalized groups, regardless of what they have perpetrated, may have inadvertent impacts on the image of others who possess similar identities (Wood, 1994). For example, gay men are typically portrayed in media as flashy, bold, flamboyant, and sexually promiscuous (Raley & Lucas, 2006); in turn, through these media stereotypes, individuals without regular social contact with gay men may associate these characteristics as such, which contributes to a harmful one-size-fits-all stereotype of a gay man.

Media portrayals of lesbians are important to analyze because of the indirect impacts these depictions have on the public perception of the group (Colvin & Moton, 2021). Mass media influences views and beliefs and can significantly skew people's knowledge on a given topic, especially if they are provided with false information (Valkenburg et al., 2016). Dependent on the media message, this can result in a change or strengthening of audience members' beliefs. For example, many accounts focus on Graham and Wood's sex life, portraying them as sexual deviants who engaged in taboo sexual practices (i.e., bondage and erotic asphyxiation during sex), which could possibly have tangible consequences for the entire lesbian and queer woman community. This portrayal fixates on a stigmatized sexual practice that one couple engaged in and may now be extrapolated to all women who have sex with other women. Further, in *Monster*, the relationship between Lee and Selby shows socially constructed gender roleplaying often misconstrued by the general public about queer relationships—Lee as the "man/dominant" and Selby as the "woman/submissive." Specifically, Lee is portrayed as "butch" where her gender presentation is hyper-masculine, mean, and tough, whereas Selby is portrayed as "femme"—small, feminine, and injured/weak. Butch and femme identities are often mapped to heteronormative gender binaries where the butch woman is understood as the "man" in the relationship—wanting to emulate a man—and the femme woman is the "real" woman acting in the stereotypical manner of a straight woman (Crawley & Willman, 2018). The gender roleplaying in *Monster* may be somewhat grounded in the historic tendency to marginalize (and misunderstand) queer women's sexuality and relationships in this way, and the heterosexual majority might already hold certain views of queer sexuality, which are reinforced through these types of portrayals.

The complete omission of lesbian serial killer sexuality in both *American Boogeywoman* and *American Horror Story: Roanoke* has interesting implications.

Which is better for the queer community: Invisibility or negative media portrayals? While this is an interesting question to ponder, both are potentially harmful and not adequate to understand the nuances and complexities of the stories. Queer invisibility has negative implications. Queer sexuality is still societally stigmatized; therefore, media serves as an important source of information for people in the queer community (Steiner et al., 1993). Excluding queer identity from *American Boogeywoman* and *American Horror Story: Roanoke* (two popular media sources with millions of viewers) omits a central part of the storyline and lived experiences. While the subjects of the movie committed horrific acts, queer viewers can still glean pertinent information from the portrayals by understanding what led Aileen, Gwen, and Cathy to perpetrate their crimes. Negative media portrayals of LGBTQIA+ characters also have poor implications for the queer community. Although a significant increase in queer representation has occurred in mass media since the 1990s, negative depictions of queer people remain (Steiner et al., 1993). Queer individuals are typically indistinguishable from their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts; however, the media often depicts them as visibly or behaviorally very different. This choice to alienate queer characters in terms of their appearance or behavior portrays them as unstable or inherently different from the norm (heterosexual and cisgender) characters (Raley & Lucas, 2006).

Monster portrays Wuornos as a hyper-masculine monster who cannot be controlled. This degrading depiction does not give weight to her lifelong polyvictimization or the myriad of other identities that impact her lived experience. The portrayal only shows *what* she has become, not the long journey of *how* she became a "monster." Her queerness, mental health diagnoses, masculinized gender presentation, and history of trauma and abuse are all disregarded in constructing the version of Wuornos as a "monster." The choice to make her intersectional identities invisible has possible negative implications. Not only does it serve to dehumanize Wuornos, but it may also signal to the audience that queer women who operate outside of gendered social norms are not "normal"—which can further ostracize this population.

Evil Woman vs. Chivalry Hypotheses

The dichotomy of the evil woman and chivalry hypotheses is often explored when considering women who commit offenses. Examining the evil woman hypothesis, women offenders (particularly those who commit violent crimes) are viewed as straying from their socially constructed gendered roles and behaviors (e.g., passive, compliant, and submissive); therefore, they receive harsher treatment and sentencing in the criminal legal system than men (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Crew, 1991; Herzog & Oreg, 2008; Simon, 1975). This deeply rooted misperception of women offenders has continued to be dominant in both society and the media. Women are viewed as committing two deviant acts in society: Breaking the law (the criminal offense) *and* violating what are "assigned" feminine roles. Overall, this hypothesis posits that women are viewed as more blameworthy due to the double deviant standard, and when a woman violates the socially constructed gender roles designated, there may be certain social consequences like stigmatization, harassment, and punishment (Chesney-Lind, 1996; Crew, 1991).

To illustrate, research discussing Wuornos and her crimes often refers to her psychopathy, antisocial personality disorder, and borderline personality disorder (Myers et al.,

2005; Perri & Lichtenwald, 2010).[10] The assumption that a woman must be "mad," "crazy," or "psychotic" to hurt others further enhances the double deviant perspective and can be used to explain why a woman would commit serial murder. In line with the evil woman hypothesis, Wuornos was treated like a man because of her queer identity, her crimes, and her rejection of socially constructed gender roles. Therefore, the saying *if it walks like a duck, it quacks like a duck, it must be a duck* was simply applied to Lee by the criminal legal system. The misperception of queer culture, the preconceived notion of gendered roles, the murder of men unknown to the offender, and utilizing a gun—not poison, which is a common method of killing among FSKs—all contributed to Wuornos's evil woman treatment—committing crimes only a man would do, further contributing to her depiction as a "man-hating lesbian" in media.

Conversely, the chivalry hypothesis suggests that in comparison to men, women receive more lenient sentences when convicted of a crime. The severity of punishment is often made by male criminal legal professionals and can be attributed to the labels and stereotypes of women as nurturing caregivers and less dangerous than men (Crew, 1991). Categorizing women as vulnerable in this hypothesis operates under the guise of patriarchy and paternalism that hold men as the arbiters of power in society—those who know best. The women must be feminine and weak for the male hegemonic criminal legal system to view them as harmless. How a woman's gender is presented (i.e., masculinely or femininely) and perceived is highly associated with how she will be treated. Appearance serves as a precursor form of interaction where the specific person assigns an identity, status, and social value to the person being perceived (Hutson, 2010; Stone, 1970).

Both the chivalry and evil woman hypotheses are applied in the case of Graham and Wood. Cathy Wood presents as a feminine woman, previously married to a man and has a child, all of which conform to the heteronormative nuclear family. She was also described as overly sensitive, insecure, and emotional—all traits commonly associated with women (Cauffiel, 1992). Wood fit the stereotypical narrative of a defenseless, passive, controlled woman who was taken advantage of by an "evil criminal." Graham, on the other hand, presented as masculine, tough, dominant, and sexually controlling in the relationship and was thus assigned the "evil woman" status in this case. Per societal standards, Graham had acted contrary to the gender norms set forth for her. This violation of gender norms is often met with harsher punishment and disdain (Farrell et al., 2011). The application of the evil woman and chivalry hypotheses was evidenced through the vastly different sentencing outcomes between Graham and Wood as well.

Lesbians on Death Row: Just the Facts, Ma'am, Just the Facts

These two applications of the evil woman and chivalry hypotheses of Wuornos, Graham, and Wood help illustrate the preconceived notions about LGBTQIA+ community and the social construction of gender in the criminal legal system. This is evidenced by the overrepresentation of lesbians on death row and substantiated through prior research (Brownworth, 1992; Farr, 2000; Mogul, 2005; Streib, 1994). As of January 1, 2022, 50 women are currently on death row in the United States, with California housing almost half of them (22) (Death Penalty Information Center, 2022). The Death Penalty Information Center (2022) states that it is rare for women to receive the death penalty