International Journal of Social Inquiry
Volume 2 Number 2 2009 pp. 141-175

Depictions of Female Offenders in Front-Page Newspaper Stories: The Importance of Race/Ethnicity*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined how a female offender's race/ethnicity influenced how she was portrayed by the media. Existing literature on gender stereotypes, racial and ethnic stereotypes, and media depictions of offenders provided the basis for this study. Few have focused solely on the media's treatment of offenders, in general, and fewer have looked closely at how the media depict female offenders, in particular. This study, therefore, filled a void. We predicted that minority women would be portrayed less favorably than white women, and conducted a content analysis of front-page newspaper articles that featured female offenders to test our expectation. The articles were gathered from two different U.S. newspapers for the 2006 calendar year – the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times. We found that stories about white female offenders were more likely to contain excuses for their alleged or actual offenses and were, therefore, more likely to take on an overall favorable tone than stories about minority female offenders.

* This research was supported in part by two grants provided by the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The first author received a summer stipend for this research from the University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and the second author was awarded a UCRCA (University Committee on Research and Creative Activity) grant. Points of view or opinions stated in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the University of Nebraska at Omaha. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology (St. Louis). Please address correspondence to Dr. Pauline Brennan, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, The University of Nebraska at Omaha, CPACS 218S, 6001 Dodge Street, Omaha, NE 68182-0149; e-mail pkbrennan@mail.unomaha.edu.

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Keywords: Media depictions of offenders, media treatment of offenders, female offenders, differential treatment by race/ethnicity, gender stereotypes, techniques of neutralization, racial/ethnic discrimination

Introduction

Many researchers have questioned how crime is portrayed by the media, and the extent to which depictions accurately reflect the types and amount of crime in society. Specifically, past researchers have examined the following: the overrepresentation of crime coverage by the media (Antunes & Hurley, 1977; Fedler & Jordan, 1982; Gardikiotis, 2003; Garofolo, 1981; Grabe, 1999; Humphries, 1981; Johnstone, Hawkins, & Michener, 1994; Windhauser, Seiter, & Winfree, 1990), discrepancies between media depictions of crime and actual crime statistics (Antunes & Hurley, 1977; Buckler & Travis, 2005; Chesney-Lind, 1999; Garofolo, 1981; Naylor, 2001; Windhauser et al., 1990), the symbiotic relationship between the media and criminal justice officials and the effects of this relationship on the accuracy of crime reporting (Antunes & Hurley, 1977; Barak, 1994; Chermak, 1994; Grabe, 1999; Sacco, 1995; Welch, Fenwick, & Roberts, 1997; Welch, Fenwick, & Roberts, 1998), and the characteristics of crime incidents (e.g. location, number of victims, offender motive) believed to enhance their newsworthiness (Buckler & Travis, 2005; Chermak, 1994, 1998; Fishman & Weimann, 1985; Gardikiotis, 2003; Garofolo, 1981; Humphries, 1981; Sacco, 1995).

While several researchers have examined the general topic of crime coverage by the media, fewer have focused on how the media depict offenders. These less common examinations provide somewhat conflicting conclusions about the "typical offender." Most find that stories about minority offenders predominate (Barak, 1994; Chermak, 1994; Dates & Pease, 1997; Entman, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1997; Grabe, 1999; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Madriz, 1997; Surette, 1992),[1] but there seems to be disagreement about whether media outlets are more likely to report stories involving male (Barak, 1994; Dates & Pease, 1997; Grabe, 1999; Madriz, 1997) or female offenders (Chermak, 1998; Entman, 1990, 1992, 1994). Some argue that females are more likely to be portrayed as victims than as offenders (Bond-Maupin, 1998; Cavender,

[1] Due to the limited number of studies that focus solely on offenders, this citation includes studies that focused on broader issues with similar conclusions.

Bond-Maupin & Jurik, 1999; Grabe, 1999; Grabe, Trager, Lear & Rauch, 2006; Madriz, 1997, Naylor, 2001).

Of the studies that closely examine media depictions of offenders, very few focus exclusively on female offenders. This is likely because females are considerably less likely to commit crimes than males; female offenders represent only a small portion of persons convicted of all crimes in state and federal courts and a very small percentage of offenders convicted of the most serious offenses (Brennan, 2006, p. 61). It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to find that examinations of media depictions of female offenders have been limited to females on death row (Farr, 1997, 2000), violent female offenders (Barnett, 2006; Edwards, 1986; Wilczynski, 1991), and case studies of highly publicized criminal women (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Huckerby, 2003). Thus, like Chermak (1998), we believe that "a wealth of information on the presentation of crime news is available, but some important gaps remain" (p. 62). We know little about how women who commit crime are portrayed by the media. This study will attempt to fill that void.

Of particular interest is how a female offender's race/ethnicity influences how she is portrayed by the media. This inquiry is significant because it does not treat race/ethnicity and sex as two separate variables; minority women differ from white women, and this difference must be considered. As noted by Reid and Comas-Diaz (1990), if one examines an offender's sex but fails to simultaneously consider her race/ethnicity, then one will provide "an incomplete and, possibly, distorted view of the behaviors" under investigation (p. 400).

We believe there are consistent differences in the portrayals of white and minority women in crime news stories. In order to examine our contention, we conducted a content analysis of front-page newspaper stories that featured female offenders. The articles were gathered from two different U.S. newspapers for the 2006 calendar year—the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times.*

Literature Review

The Importance of Gender Expectations

Females Offenders Violate Gender Expectations

Much of the previous research conducted on media depictions of female offenders underscores the importance of gender stereotypes and gender-role

expectations. Stereotypes operate like mental shortcuts that allow individuals to quickly retrieve information from memory without expending much cognitive effort (Entman, 1997; Fairchild & Cozens, 1981; Gladwell, 2005; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Willemsen and van Schie, 1989). Consistent with this notion, Healey (1997) noted that "we judge people as well as things and sometimes we categorize others based upon a quick appraisal of their most obvious characteristics" (p. 29). A person's biological sex is "highly visible" (Healey, 1997, p. 135); it is among the first things that individuals notice about one another (Brennan, 2002, p. 7). This is important because biological sex dictates expected behavior (i.e., gender-role expectations).

Gender-role expectations are "behavioral norms…derived from stereotypes" (Willemsen & van Schie, 1989, p. 624) about the characteristics that a man or woman should possess and how s/he should conduct him/herself. Although based on biological sex, gender roles are socially learned (for discussion, see Brennan, 2002), and, "once learned, they are formalized, legitimated, and perpetuated by values and beliefs embodied in societal institutions and social structures" (Brennan, 2002, p. 10; see also Grabe, 1999; Grabe et al., 2006; Madriz, 1997).[2]

Many stereotypes about appropriate conduct for women come from ideas about their "proper" place in society. Much of society still believes that women should be wives and mothers (for discussions, see Brennan, 2002; Broverman et al., 1972; Cavender et al., 1999; Huckerby, 2003; Naylor, 2001). Good mothers are nurturing, emotional, and nonaggressive; good wives are passive, cooperative, chaste, and dependent on their husbands (for discussions, see Brennan, 2002; Broverman et al., 1972; Cavender et al., 1999; Huckerby, 2003; Macdonald, 1995; Naylor, 2001;Young, 1986). Women who behave in this manner conform to gender-role expectations and, consequently, are looked upon favorably; women who fail to do so are considered abnormal and, as a result, are viewed much more negatively (Brennan, 2002, p. 11; for further discussions, see also Broverman et al., 1972; Cavender et al., 1999; Huckerby, 2003; Macdonald, 1995; Naylor, 2001; Young, 1986).

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[2] To be clear, the terms "sex" and "gender" have two distinct meanings, although some scholars have incorrectly interchanged the terms. To clarify, "sex" is a biologically determined variable but "gender" is a socially construed concept. Therefore, in order to avoid inaccuracies in our discussion of the extant literature, we are careful to use the proper term where deemed appropriate.

Much of the previous research on female offenders underscores how gender stereotypes impact expectations of appropriate behavior from females (see, for example, Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Brennan, 2002, 2006; Daly, 1994; Grabe et al., 2006; Huckerby, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Young, 1986). Females are not expected to commit crime. Willemsen and van Schie (1989) found that "stereotypes about criminal behavior were very pronounced and predominantly masculine" (p. 635), and these "stereotypes influence[d] the interpretation of behavior" (p. 625). Female offenders, therefore, have not only broken the law, but have also "transgressed the norms and expectations associated with appropriate feminine behaviour (sic)" (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002, p. 50).

The Media Depict Female Offenders as either "Bad" Women or "Mad/Sad" Women

Scholars have generally found that the media group female offenders into one of two simple categories—"bad" women and "mad/sad" women.[3] This conclusion is based on our review of studies that focus on depictions/perceptions of female offenders. A summary of these studies is presented in Appendix A. Although the specific analytical content of these studies differs, the identified themes are similar. To elaborate, "bad" women are described as women who willfully defy traditional gender-role expectations through their own intentional actions. Such women are: (1) demonized (Ballinger, 1996; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Naylor, 2001), (2) "masculinized" (i.e., described as masculine in appearance and/or personality) (Ballinger, 1996; Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Bond-Maupin, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 1999; Farr, 1997, 2000; Grabe et al., 2006; Huckerby, 2003; Wilczynski, 1991; Willemsen & van Schie, 1989), (3) chastised for their violation(s) of domestic responsibility (Ballinger, 1996; Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Bond-Maupin, 1998; Farr, 1997, 2000; Huckerby, 2003; Wilczynski, 1991; Willemsen & van Schie, 1989), and/or (4) admonished for sexual and other deviance (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Bond-Maupin, 1998; Farr, 1997, 2000; Van Brunschot, Sydie, & Krull, 1999). These general themes create unfavorable narratives for certain female offenders. Such unfavorable depictions function to "[cast] out these women from the ranks of 'true womanhood,' which in turn excludes them from the benefits, however dubious, of that status" (Kraditor, 1997, as cited in Chesney-Lind, 1999, p. 132). Because these women are portrayed as "bad" and, therefore, deliberately responsible for their actions, one is likely to conclude that punishment is deserved (Gandy, 1997, p. 39).

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[3] Researchers have also found that members of the public conceptualize offenders into very simple categories of "good" and "evil." The media help perpetuate these categorizations.

On the other hand, however, there are instances when women are portrayed as not fully responsible for their actions; the images, narratives, and discussions that surround these women provide justification for labeling them as "mad" or "sad." Some external factor excuses the criminal behavior of these women, which allows the media to depict them as "victims of circumstance". Specifically, in order to garner sympathy for these women, the media are likely to: (1) attribute criminal behavior to a biological malady or medical condition (Armstrong, 1999; Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Edwards, 1986; Huckerby, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Wilczynski, 1991), (2) emphasize the offender's feminine appearance (Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Farr, 2000), (3) describe adherence to traditional female traits and fulfillment of domestic responsibilities (Barnett, 2006; Berrington & Honkatukia, 2002; Bond-Maupin, 1998; Edwards, 1986; Grabe et al,. 2006; Huckerby, 2003; Naylor, 2001; Wilczynski, 1991), and/or (4) portray the offender as sexually and religiously pure (Barnett, 2006; Farr, 2000; Huckerby, 2003; Wilczynski, 1991). These explanations are often used in tandem. Because these explanations work to increase sympathy, one may conclude that these women should not be punished for their criminal actions.

The Importance of Race/Ethnicity

Although several scholars have examined media depictions of female offenders, few have considered how a female offender's race/ethnicity may impact media coverage. Additional consideration of an offender's race/ethnicity is important because "[w]hile gender is recognized as a highly salient characteristic by which we identify and distinguish individuals; it is often surpassed by race (Grady, 1977)" (Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990, p. 399). Healey (1997, p. 9) similarly argues that while both biological sex and race are significant and "highly visible," race (by itself), is important for a number of reasons:

> Racial characteristics such as skin color aren't necessarily any more obvious than other traits (like hair length or size of nose), but they are one of the first and, for many, most important pieces of information we recognize about one another. Our perceptions and impressions in the present are conditioned by the dividing lines that reflect group relations in the past. Our "knowledge" that skin color can be used to judge others, and our sensitivity to this characteristic, reflects our socialization into a race-conscious society with a long history of racial stratification (Healey, 1997, p. 29).

Thus, categorizations based on race/ethnicity allow individuals a simple way to differentiate among people (Rattner, 1996, p. 7). Differences among groups are "broadened and precipitated when stereotypes are attached to them—especially stereotypes containing the assumption that people who look different will behave differently" (Rattner, 1996, p. 135; see also Brennan, 2002; Kurokawa, 1971; Willemsen & van Schie, 1989). Stereotypes become problematic when differential behavioral expectations materialize due to such compartmentalization.

Negative Racial/Ethnic Stereotypes

Much has been written about the prevalence of negative racial/ethnic stereotypes in American society (see, for example, Barak, 1994; Brennan, 2002, 2006; Dates & Pease, 1997; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996; Surette, 1992). Kurokawa (1971) points out that in American society, where whites comprise the majority, "white ethnocentrism prevails, attributing a positive image to the whites and a negative one to other racial groups" (p. 214). In support of this notion, Gladwell (2005, pp. 81-87) described findings from the Race Implicit Association Test. The test presented black and white faces on a computer screen, along with words such as "good," "bad," "wonderful," and "evil," to name a few. Respondents were asked to link such words to either a white or a black face. Gladwell (2005) reported that "more than 80 percent of all those who have ever taken the test end up having pro-white associations" (p. 84) and that about half the African-Americans tested also made more pro-white than pro-black associations (p. 85). He went on to explain that the results were not surprising because whites are paired with good things in media outlets such as newspapers and television.

In addition to negative stereotypes for minorities, in general, there are also specific negative stereotypes for minority women, in particular. Landrine (1985), for example, found that white women were more likely to be stereotyped as "competent, dependent, emotional, intelligent, passive…and warm" (p. 72), whereas black women were more likely to be stereotyped as "dirty, hostile, and superstitious" (p. 71-72). Furthermore, other scholars have found a strong tendency for minority females, in general, to be stereotyped as "hyper sexed" (Farr, 2000, p. 55; see also Madriz, 1997; Young, 1986) and as "welfare queens" (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997, p. 393). Black women, like their male counterparts, are also commonly depicted as aggressive or dangerous (Brennan, 2002, 2006; Farr, 1997; Madriz, 1997, Young, 1986).

Past Research on Depictions of Minority Criminality by the Media

A number of extant studies indicate that minorities, especially African-Americans, are likely to be depicted and, therefore, perceived by others as violent or aggressive (Barak, 1994; Barlow, 1998; Entman, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1997; "How do Americans View One Another?," 1990; Humphries, 1981; Hurwitz et al., 1997; Madriz, 1997; Sarat, 1993; Smith, 1990). While this conclusion is informative, it reveals little about depictions of minority women relative to white women. Most examinations of minority offenders do not systematically consider how sex and race interact to influence more or less favorable media coverage. To date, there are only four published studies of how media portrayals differ for minority women versus white women (i.e., Bond-Maupin, 1998; Farr, 1997, 2000; Huckerby, 2003).[4] The main conclusion that seems to underlie all these studies is that white women are more likely than minority women to have their behavior excused in some way.

Farr (1997) found that women on death row could be classified as falling into one of five categories, depending on their personal characteristics and the circumstances surrounding their crimes. Women of color fell disproportionately into two categories – the "Explosive Avengers" and "Robber-Predators" (Farr, 1997, p. 267, 268). The Explosive Avengers "often were described as manlike or lesbian" and, therefore, "poly-deviant" with crimes that resembled those committed by men (Farr, 1997, p. 268). Similarly, in Farr's (2000) later discussion of only lesbians on death row, she found that for 14 of the 35 cases in her sample, the "representations [of the women] were masculinized. […] All but one of them were women of color" (p. 56).[5]

Bond-Maupin's (1998) examination of depictions of female offenders on the television program *America's Most Wanted* also revealed that a woman's race/ethnicity influenced depictions of her femininity. Specifically, she observed that

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[4] Also noteworthy is the work conducted by Madriz (1997). She focused primarily on how race/ethnicity impacted perceptions of "ideal" offenders and victims (Madriz, 1997, p. 343). More specifically, she examined how women's fear of crime was affected by the common perception of offenders as young, minority males and the common perception of victims as white, middle class females. Because her study was not devoted to depictions of female offenders, however, it does not meet the requirements to be considered relevant to this section of the paper. Chesney-Lind (1999) studied how female offenders, in general, were demonized by the media; attention was not paid to differential racial/ethnic portrayals.

[5] While it is expected that all of the women on death row would be depicted negatively, given the extreme nature of their offenses and their extreme punishment, Farr (1997, 2000) found that the severity of the negative depictions did vary by race/ethnicity.

> Dominant notions of femininity are widely used…. One pervasive image associated with dominant interpretations of femininity is sexuality. This television sexuality is manipulative and bestows power on women that men cannot resist. […] Ethnicity makes manipulative sexuality exotic. It also establishes a social distance between White fugitives and women of color. Although viewers are warned that White fugitives are dangerous, the most ruthless [because of their exotic sexuality] are Russian or Asian (p. 43).

Huckerby (2003) arrived at a similar conclusion upon examination of the print media's portrayal of Khoua Her, a 24-year-old Hmong immigrant from Thailand convicted of killing her children. Overall, she found that Her's femininity was diminished because of her "outsider status" (p. 153) and perceived sexual deviance, which meant that "not all criminal mothers [were] subject to the same treatment by the criminal justice system or media" (p. 152). In other words, stereotypes held for white women serve to excuse their criminal actions, but more negative stereotypes for minority women increase their likelihood of being held accountable

While the conclusions provided in the aforementioned studies are interesting and informative, they may not be generalizable to female offenders as a whole. Huckerby (2003) focused on two highly publicized instances of maternal filicide (i.e., Khoua Her and Andrea Yates). Farr (1997, 2000) examined media depictions of women on death row. Crimes that warrant the death penalty are far from ordinary and, by definition, far more heinous than other offenses. And, while Bond-Maupin (1998) studied television portrayals of female offenders involved in a wider array of largely violent offenses, she did not focus specifically on how race/ethnicity influenced these depictions.[6]

Given the limited nature of the extant literature, we decided to conduct an exploratory study of how race/ethnicity conditioned media depictions of female offenders. Based in part on the findings from Bond-Maupin's (1998), Farr's (1997, 2000), and Huckerby's (2003) research we expected that race/ethnicity would affect presentations of female offenders. In particular, we believed that white women would be portrayed more favorably than minority women. Unlike previous inquiries that focused on women who committed atypical offenses (e.g., murder), however, we considered all

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[6] Bond-Maupin (1998) only briefly discussed differences in the media's portrayal of white versus minority women. Instead, her discussion was centered around the seemingly racially- and ethnically- neutral themes of sexuality, conventional gender norms, and male control.

reports of crimes committed by females. Specifically, we gathered all calendar year 2006 front-page news stories about female offenders from two U.S. newspapers— the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*. Specifications about our methodological approach are provided in the next section.

Methodology

We selected the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* because they are nationally available, have wide readership, and are based in cities with large minority populations. The demographic composition of these areas is important because we needed to ensure that the newspapers we examined would have a sufficient number of articles about minority women to allow us to draw meaningful conclusions (see Buckler & Travis, 2005). We selected front-page stories because previous researchers have noted that newspaper editors consider these stories the most important ones of the day and/or the ones that entice the largest audience (Buckler & Travis, 2005; Chermak, 1998; Surette, 1992).

We examined all front-page stories about either "actual" or "alleged" criminality where a female offender was named. Actual criminality occurred when reporters mentioned an offender's formal contact with the criminal justice system (e.g., an arrest, a filed charge, a sentence). The overwhelming majority of stories were of this variety. In the stories of alleged criminality the reporter either indicated that a female was under investigation by criminal justice authorities, although no formal contact with the criminal justice system had yet occurred, or insinuated that a female's actions had some underlying criminal component. Thus, because stories of alleged criminality provided evidence of possible criminal behavior, these stories were also analyzed (Appendices B and C provide listings of the stories analyzed from both papers). We then determined whether minority female offenders were portrayed differently than white female offenders.[7]

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 denotes how many of the stories were about white versus minority women. The table presents a shaded dichotomous measure that grouped

[7] We read and rated all newspaper articles independently on two separate occasions. These reviews were spaced approximately six months apart to eliminate any recency bias; there was a 98 percent agreement across time periods. We then assessed interrater agreement by comparing our separate results; our extent of agreement was 97 percent. In those rare instances where we did not agree, we discussed our varying results and arrived at a consensus.

offenders as either "white" or "minority," which is the measure we used in the analyses that follow.

Table 1. Sample characteristics (n=54)[1]

Variable	n	%
Race/ethnicity[2]		
White	23	48.9
Combined Minority Group[3]	24	51.1
Black	9	19.1
Latina	11	23.4
Other[4]	2	4.3
Multiple Minority[5]	2	4.3
Offense Type		
Murder/Attempted Murder	21	38.9
Other Violent Offense[6]	7	13.0
White Collar Crime[7]	17	31.5
Illegal Immigration	1	1.9
Drug Offense	7	13.0
General Story about Female Offenders	1	1.9

[1]Due to missing or non-applicable data, the total number of stories may not equal 54 for some of the variables.

[2]There were seven stories where the race/ethnicity of the female offender was not presented in either narrative or visual form.

[3]All minority women were grouped together. This grouping includes black, Latina, European Muslim, and Native American women.

[4]The "Other" category includes European Muslim and Native American women.

[5]Two stories included multiple female offenders of different racial/ethnic minority backgrounds. The race/ethnicity of the women in these stories, therefore, was coded as "multiple."

[6]The "Other Violent Offenses" category included child abuse, kidnapping, assault, and sex offenses.

[7]The "White Collar Crime" category included misuse of office, illegal eavesdropping, and corporate "pretexting."

As Table 1 indicates, the number of stories gathered for both groups was nearly equal; 48.9 percent of stories had a white female offender and 51.1 percent featured a minority woman offender. The interested reader will further notice that the table also presents the specific categories of minority women. Stories about black and Latina women were most common.

Table 1 also indicates that the types of offenses that female offenders committed varied. Thirty-nine percent of the stories were about murder or attempted murder. Another 13 percent were about some other type of

violent offense. Close to half of the stories, therefore, were not about women who engaged in acts of violence. Specifically, close to a third pertained to white collar crime, one story was about illegal immigration, seven stories were about drug offenders, and one was a general story about crime where a female offender was referenced by name.[8] The types of reported offenses did not differ by race/ethnicity (not shown in the table). [9] Therefore, the influence of offense type was not examined more closely.

Measures of Media Portrayals

In order to test our expectation that white women would experience more positive treatment by the media than minority women, we examined the effect of race/ethnicity on 14 different measures. We used Sykes and Matza's (1957) discussion of "Techniques of Neutralization" to guide our analyses. We believe that newspaper reporters use similar justifications when they write their stories about certain female offenders. To be clear, we are not testing their theory. Instead, we use their concepts and terminology as a guiding paradigm for our research.

Neutralization[10]

In order to determine how favorably a female offender was portrayed, we considered seven different measures of neutralization. Table 2 indicates that 30 percent of all stories took on an overall favorable tone based on our assessment of the extent of emphasis placed on one or more neutralizers.

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[8] The distribution of crime stories here does not reflect the types of crimes that are more or less likely to be reported to law enforcement. To elaborate, and for example, according to the most recent Uniform Crime Report, only 3.3 percent of all female offenders were arrested for some type of violent offense, and less than one-tenth of one percent were arrested for either murder or non-negligent manslaughter (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008, Table 48).

[9] There is limited statistical information on the types of crimes committed by white versus minority women. The U.S. Department of Justice Uniform Crime Report does not simultaneously consider the interaction between sex and race/ethnicity; while information is provided separately by sex (i.e., for men and for women) and by race (i.e., for white offenders versus black and Hispanic offenders), distributions are not provided for white women (or white men) versus other women (or other men). Information gathered from a dated source suggests that female violent offenders, in general, are more likely to be described by their victims as white (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999, p. 2). However, this appears to be true only for the crime of simple assault. Victims have reported that black and white women are equally likely to commit robbery and aggravated assault (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999, p. 2).

[10] It is important to note that neither the "neutralizers" nor the "exacerbators" are mutually exclusive. For example, a reporter could work a number of neutralizers and exacerbators into the same story. Therefore, the percentages presented in this paper only refer to the presence or absence of a particular measure in a story.

Table 2. Measures of neutralızatıon (n=54)

Variable	n	%
Overall Favorable Tone		
No	38	70.4
Yes	16	29.6
Denial of Responsibility (DR)		
No	34	63.0
Yes	20	37.0
Denial of Injury (DI)		
No	45	83.3
Yes	9	16.7
Denial of Victim (DV)		
No	45	83.3
Yes	9	16.7
Appeal to Higher Loyalty (AL)		
No	39	72.2
Yes	15	27.8
Condemnation of the Condemners (CC)		
No	44	81.5
Yes	10	18.5
Reformation through Disengagement (RD)		
No	51	94.4
Yes	3	5.6

With regard to specific "neutralizers," close to 40 percent of the stories denied the female offender's responsibility for the crime. Injury was minimized (or denied) in 16.7 percent of the stories, and in nine stories reporters indicated (or insinuated) that no one was harmed. Table 2 further indicates that nearly 30 percent of the stories explained that the female offender committed her crime for the benefit of others (i.e., an "appeal to a higher loyalty"). Slightly less than 20 percent of stories criticized law enforcement or other social agency tactics, a technique that Sykes and Matza (1957) refer to as "condemnation of the condemners." In addition to these known techniques of neutralization, we also found that some reporters described how certain female offenders were reformed through a process of disassociation from a criminal past. However, as Table 2 indicates, stories that contained such an element were rare.

Exacerbation

In order to determine how unfavorably a female offender was portrayed, we considered seven different measures of exacerbation. Table 3 indicates that 46.3 percent of the stories took on an overall unfavorable tone.

Table 3. Measures of exacerbation (n=54)

Variable	n	%
Overall Unfavorable Tone		
No	29	53.7
Yes	25	46.3
Guilt Attributed (GA)		
No	13	24.1
Yes	41	75.9
Real Injury (RI)		
No	30	55.6
Yes	24	44.4
Real Victim (RV)		
No	29	53.7
Yes	25	46.3
Self Interest (SI)		
No	41	75.9
Yes	13	24.1
Praise for the Condemners (PC)		
No	46	85.2
Yes	8	14.8
No Hope for Reformation (NR)		
No	34	63.0
Yes	20	37.0

Moreover, approximately three-quarters of the stories attributed guilt to the accused woman in some fashion. Over 40 percent of the stories discussed the extent of injury that occurred and about the same number of stories (46.5%) included remarks about a specific victim. A motive of self-interest was present in 13 of the stories, and police or other agency work was praised in eight stories. Finally, Table 3 indicates that close to 40 percent of the stories depicted the female offender as having no hope of reformation.

Findings

We expected that stories about white female offenders would be more likely to contain neutralizers and, therefore, to take on an overall favorable tone than stories about minority female offenders. Figure 1 depicts the racial/ethnic distribution for various measures of neutralization, while Figure 2 depicts the racial/ethnic distribution for various measures of exacerbation for our sample.

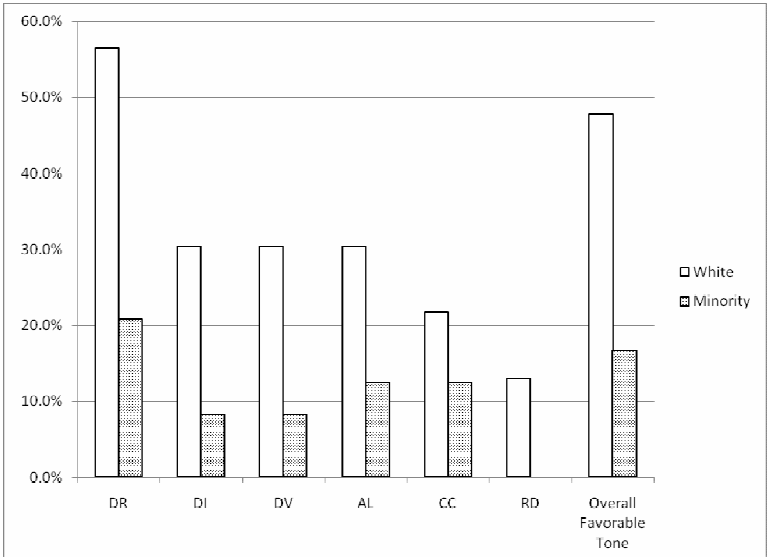

Figure 1. Measures of neutralization by race/ethnicity (n=47)

KEY: DR = Denial of Responsibility, DI = Denial of Injury, DV = Denial of Victim, AL = Appeal to Higher Loyalties, CC = Condemnation of the Condemners, RD = Reformation through Disengagement

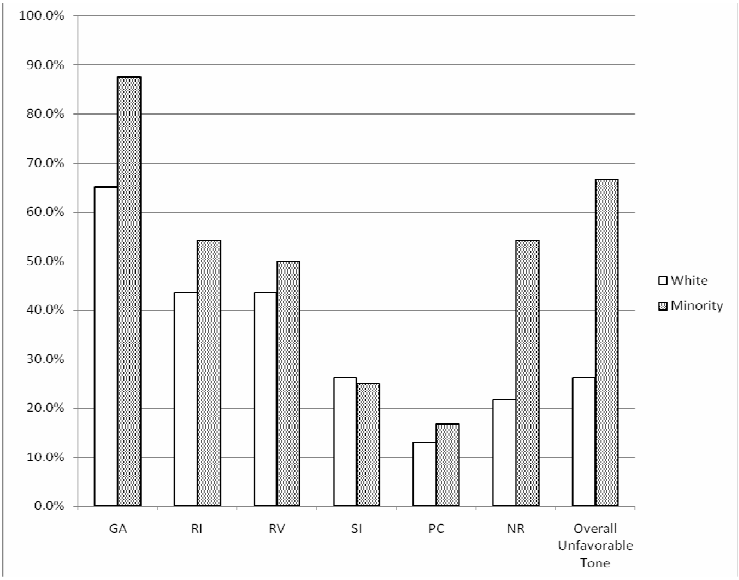

Figure 2. Measures of exacerbation by race/ethnicity (n=47)

KEY: GA = Guilt Attributed, RI = Real Injury, RV = Real Victim, SI = Self-Interested, PC = Praise for the Condemners, NR = No Hope for Reformation

The findings illustrated by both figures provide support for our hypothesis. We will now discuss our findings in greater detail.

Overall Favorable Tone vs. Overall Unfavorable Tone

In order to determine the overall tone of the article (i.e., favorable or unfavorable), we considered the overall impression that a reader was likely to have of an offender after reading a story in its entirety. If the story placed a substantial emphasis on one or more neutralizer(s), we concluded that the article's overall tone was favorable. Similarly, if more attention was given to one or more exacerbator(s), the story was deemed to have an overall unfavorable tone. Figure 1 indicates that stories about white women were nearly three times more likely to have an overall favorable tone than were stories about minority women (47.8 percent versus 16.7 percent, respectively). We reached the opposite conclusion when we examined how race/ethnicity was related to stories that were overwhelmingly unfavorable. Specifically, while two-thirds of the stories about minority women were predominately negative, only about one-quarter of the stories about white women had a similar tone.

Denial of Responsibility vs. Guilt Attributed

Some of the stories indicated that an accused woman was not fully responsible for her actions due to some external circumstance or force beyond her control, which we coded as "denial of responsibility". This measure is consistent with previous references to "mad" or "sad" women. Figure 1 indicates that responsibility was denied in 56.5 percent of stories about white women, but in less than 21 percent of stories about minority women. One example of the use of this technique comes from a story in the *Los Angeles Times* about Andrea Yates, a white woman from Texas who was convicted of drowning her five children in a bathtub. The reporter explained how the offender was found "not guilty by reason of insanity." To elaborate, he explained how Yates believed that "she was possessed by the devil and that the media had planted bugs in her house to record her poor parenting" and that she had a "well-chronicled history of mental problems" (Bustillo, 2006, p. A16). Part of this history included post-partum depression, and Yates became its poster-child (Bustillo, 2006, p. A16). Moreover, Yates's husband was quoted as saying that she was "'psychotic'" when the crime occurred, and was "ordinarily a loving mother, who was crippled by disease" (Bustillo, 2006, p. A16). Thus, readers are left with the impression that Yates's actions were caused by psychological factors completely out of her control.

Stories that attributed guilt to a female offender, in contrast, indicated that the crime was committed freely with no extraneous causes. Our assessments of attributions of guilt are consistent with references to "bad" women made by previous scholars. Figure 2 suggests that guilt was more likely to be attributed in the stories about minority women (87.5% versus 65.2%). However, Figure 2 also suggests that an attribution of guilt did not necessarily affect the likelihood that a story would take on an overall unfavorable tone.

One story that focused mainly on the attribution of guilt was about a Latina woman named Nixzaliz Santiago. This article, which appeared in the *New York Times*, explained how she killed one of her children. Unlike Yates, however, Santiago was described by *Times* reporters as a mother who willfully assisted her husband in the torturing and killing of their daughter. Graphic descriptions of Santiago's crime appeared numerous times throughout the article. The first sentence of the article described "the bruised body of a 7-year-old girl [that] was discovered in a blood-stained Brooklyn apartment" (Feuer & Lueck, 2006, p. A1). In addition to the graphic reports of the child's tortured body, the reporters also chronicled a detailed history of the family's involvement with various social service agencies. These repeated contacts serve to illustrate Santiago's wanton disregard for the welfare of her child, and leads readers to conclude that she is absolutely guilty.

Denial of Injury, Denial of Victim vs. Real Injury, Real Victim

Reporters may also minimize the amount of harm done by the offender and/or indicate or imply that no one was really harmed. Either (or both) of these neutralizers appeared in about 30 percent of the stories about white female offenders; only eight percent of stories about minority female offenders denied harm or denied the existence of a victim. To illustrate the use of these neutralizers, we provide a closer examination of the stories written about one white female offender—Patricia Dunn, the former chairwoman of Hewlett-Packard.

An interesting feature about some of the stories about Patricia Dunn was that reporters were not clear about whether any harm resulted from her actions. For example, one cannot readily discern the identity of the victim(s) after reading an article from the *Los Angeles Times* titled "Spiraling Scandal Engulfs Tech Icon" (Streitfeld, Granelli, & Menn, 2006, p. A1). To elaborate, the article begins with brief descriptions of three individuals—Patricia Dunn, Thomas Perkins, and George Keyworth. We are told that "all are at

the center of a broadening criminal probe and corporate scandal that has Silicon Valley wondering what went wrong at Hewlett-Packard…" (Streitfeld et al., 2006, p. A1), but readers have no idea what offense was committed or if any of these three individuals were criminally responsible. The article continues to page A14 where we learn that some members of the board "hired private investigators to spy on other board members…. Phone records apparently were obtained by investigators using false pretenses and fake e-mail addresses" (Streitfeld et al., 2006). Again, we do not know whether any of these three individuals were directly involved. In fact, it is not until the twelfth paragraph in this story that we learn that Dunn arranged for private investigators to look into the source of an HP corporate leak, and that Keyworth and Perkins were the alleged victims.

The reporters, however, make it seem like these men suffered no injury and, as such, are not victims. Readers are told that Perkins, a "legendary financier," could not be reached for comment because he was "sailing the Mediterranean on the Maltese Falcon, at 289 feet, the world's longest clipper yacht" (Streitfeld et al., 2006, pp. A1, A14). Reporters additionally relate how he recently authored "'Sex and the Single Zillionaire,' a novel about a wealthy man who modestly says he does something in computers" (Streitfeld et al., 2006, p. A14). They continue to describe him as "very stubborn" person who is "used to getting his own way" (Streitfeld et al., 2006, p. A14). Indeed, a president of a local technological company was quoted as asking the rhetorical question, "'When was the last time someone said no to Tom Perkins and stuck a finger in his eye?'" (Streitfeld et al., 2006, p. A14). This leaves readers wondering whether Perkins was victimized or is merely angry because he did not get his way.

Reporters continue by describing George Keyworth, the other supposed victim, as a man who can "hold his own" because he was "'a guy who was involved in the inner-most workings of the U.S. nuclear program in the 1970s, who understands how to operate at the highest levels of political, corporate and scientific communities...'" (Streitfeld et al., 2006, p. A14). In a different article, from the *New York Times*, readers learn that Keyworth was the source of leaked confidential information (Richtel, 2006). Moreover, we learn that during the course of the investigation, Keyworth was engaged in a "heated discussion" with Thomas Perkins (Richtel, 2006, p. C7). One source quoted in the article stated, "'The arguments were mainly one-sided, with Keyworth intently speaking and even pointing his finger at Perkins' chest several times. At the very end of the second argument/heated discussion, Keyworth was overheard as saying: "They don't have enough to go there"'" (Richtel, 2006, p. C7). Mentions of Keyworth's dubious actions and his

aggressive behavior lead the reader to wonder how he was involved with the leak and whether accusations against Dunn were justified.

In contrast to the stories about Patricia Dunn, there were other stories that emphasized the amount of harm done to a specific victim. Figure 2 indicates that slightly more of the stories about minority women include mention of these exacerbators (54.2% versus 43.5%). A story from the *New York Times*, for example, discussed how a black woman neglected and abused five foster children for years. The *Times* reported that when Vanessa Jones was brought into court, the judge and prosecutor made no effort to minimize the harm she inflicted. The judge admonished her by saying, "'[y]ou had boys who clearly needed help…. To do nothing in the face of serious problems demonstrates an absolute failure to recognize fundamental obligations'" (Jones, 2006, p. B5). Quotes from the victims, themselves, focused further attention on the gravity of the offense. One victim stated,

> "You didn't take us to any doctor's appointments. You wouldn't let us take a shower when we were dirty. […] You yelled at us, cursed at us, hit us with brooms, rulers, sticks, shoes and belt buckles; I still have the marks to prove it...." (Jones, 2006, p. B5)

The judge said that "[Jones's] conduct 'fits the description of cruel activity,'" while the prosecutor added: "'If we knew these kinds of things happened, we would be able to put ourselves in the shoes of defendants, in the shoes of mass murderers, in the shoes of people who do horrible things to young children'" (Jones, 2006, p. B5).

Appeal to Higher Loyalties vs. Self-Interest

Figure 1 further indicates that stories about white women were more than two times as likely to suggest that crimes were committed for the benefit of others (30.4% versus 12.5%). However, none of the stories about white or minority women used this as the predominant excuse. There were, however, instances where reporters devoted a majority of their attention to an offender's self-interested motivations. Interestingly, as Figure 2 indicates, white and minority women were equally likely to have their actions described in this manner (26.1 percent versus 25 percent, respectively). For purposes of illustration we provide a more detailed explanation of how this method of exacerbation was used to explain the actions of a Latina offender.

In "Dark End to a Hunt for Love" (McDonnell, 2006, p. A1), a *Los Angeles Times* reporter provided a detailed narrative about Regina Rachid's intricate

plot of deception and murder. We are told that Rachid began an intimate overseas relationship with a white man, Richard Merrill, from the United States in order to systematically gain access to his credit cards and bank accounts. Coaxed by declarations of undying love and affection from Rachid, Merrill made frequent visits to Brazil. When he failed to return home after one of these visits, his family contacted local authorities. FBI investigators found "backed-up mail [that] showed tens of thousands of dollars streaming from Merrill's accounts. Unpaid bills were piling up, and the house was nearing foreclosure" (McDonnell, 2006, p. A11). Later, $132,000 was withdrawn from one of his accounts at a UBS bank located in Las Vegas.

> Eventually, USB officials blocked further transfers. [Later], branch officials received a grammatically suspect e-mail purporting to be from Merrill – using a Hotmail account in his name – seeking $50,000. […] Investigators would later conclude that Merrill had been dead for almost two months… (McDonnell, 2006, p. A11)

Rachid was arrested for fraud and murder. Authorities searched her home and found "that the house had recently had a complete makeover: new paint, furniture, appliances. An extensive handwritten 'to-buy' list noted new televisions, DVDs, a refrigerator, a dryer, bedclothes, patio furniture, artwork, rocks for the front pond and an outdoor grill" (McDonnell, 2006, p. A11).

Condemnation of the Condemners vs. Praise for the Condemners

Reporters may also shift blame from the female offender to those who have accused her of wrongdoing. This reporting tactic appeared in 21.7 percent of the stories for white women and in 12.5 percent of the stories about minority women. One series of stories that provided the best example of the use of this technique of neutralization pertained to a white female doctor, Anna Pou, and two white female nurses. These women were accused of killing patients in a New Orleans hospital, rather than evacuating them, after Hurricane Katrina. Although these stories reference the women's responsibility for their actions, overall focus was on how these women were left to make tough choices without the assistance of any State or local authorities. The events in question happened "three days after [Hurricane] Katrina struck New Orleans, leaving the city in chaos and deep water. There was no electricity, water or phone service at the hospital, and only a few rescue boats were available for evacuations" (Fausset & Simmons, 2006, p. A22). In a separate article from the *New York Times,* Dr. Pou's attorney said

that "'she volunteered for storm duty and stayed there for five days… and then the State of Louisiana abandoned the patients and the hospitals and everybody else'" (Nossiter & Dewan, 2006, pp. A1, A19). The series of articles also contained statements from many medical professionals who reported that they, too, felt abandoned by the State of Louisiana and, most notably, the Louisiana Attorney General, Charles Foti. A statement made by Dr. Hamm of Tulane University School of Medicine provided a summary of what he and the other doctors felt toward Foti: "'Where the hell was he?...Where the hell was the law enforcement? Where the hell was anybody until Friday?' – Sept. 2, the day large-scale evacuations began in many areas" (Fausset & Simmons, 2006, p. A22). Hamm continued, "'If you want to know who to prosecute, if you want to know who is responsible for people dying, it's the people who were not here…. It's not the people who were here'" (Fausset & Simmons, 2006, p. A22). The reader is left with the impression that the Attorney General, rather than the doctors and the nurses, did something wrong.

Rather than attacking those who accuse others of criminal wrongdoing, it is also possible for reporters to offer approval and support for the apprehension of criminal offenders by law enforcement and other social service agents (i.e., "praise for the condemners"). This technique of exacerbation, however, was infrequently used the stories examined here. Specifically, it was mentioned in only 13 percent of the stories about white female offenders and in only 16.7 percent of stories about minority women. The story of Regina Rachid, discussed in a previous section, serves as an illustration of how praise may be given to law enforcement. While a fair amount of the story focuses on the heinousness of Rachid's crime and her self-interest, a significant portion describes the valiant efforts made by law enforcement officials that enabled them to catch her and her two male accomplices. The reporter relates that the Brazilian police contacted Rachid about Merrill's disappearance after being "[p]rodded by U.S. authorities" (McDonnell, 2006, p. A10) and that the investigations continued relentlessly until they were able to connect Rachid to Merrill's death through "the unlikely guise of a botched robbery" (McDonnell, 2006, p. A10). At the robbery scene, "police discovered a handbag. It belonged to Rachid; along with her identification, the bag contained Merrill's Citibank ATM card" (McDonnell, 2006, p. A10). The reporter then described the month-long efforts taken by police to gather evidence and how they eventually "swooped in" and made arrests in the case (McDonnell, 2006, p. A11). As a testament to the hard work of law enforcement, the investigation "[included] six volumes of e-mails, cellphone records, photos, declarations and other evidence" (McDonnell, 2006, p. A11). The deputy police chief in San Jose dos Campos, Brazil, was quoted as saying definitively, "'We have the elements

to prosecute the three suspects for Merrill's murder'" (McDonnell, 2006, p. A11).

Reformation through Disengagement vs. No Hope for Reformation

As mentioned earlier, the five techniques of neutralization we borrowed from Sykes and Matza captured many, but not all, of the recurring themes in the stories analyzed. Our created sixth neutralizer, "reformation through disengagement," appeared when reporters discussed a female offender's prior criminality but emphasized reform and separation from her past. The implication is that a reader should no longer fear this woman. Figure 1 indicates how race/ethnicity influenced the use of this technique; only white women had their criminal behavior excused in this manner.

This excuse provided the overwhelming narrative for a story about Sara Olson, a white woman who had once been a member of the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) and who is currently serving a prison sentence for "attempting to explode a destructive device with the intent to commit murder" (Warren, 2006, p. A12). The most important message, however, was that she has not been a member of this terrorist organization in over two decades. Her militant past was neutralized through the reporter's overwhelming emphasis on her current redemptive qualities.

Olson is now a quiet, cooperative, selfless, passive, and nurturing woman who spent her years in exile as a devoted wife and mother. Before her incarceration, she was "living openly [in St. Paul, Minnesota] as a doctor's wife and mother of three girls in an ivy-covered Tudor home" (Warren, 2006, p. A12) and "taught citizenship courses. She volunteered for groups aiding African refugees, the poor and other causes, and recorded books for the blind" (Warren, 2006, p. A12). Throughout the article, she was repeatedly described as a "quiet" inmate who worried about the other inmates and even worked as an advocate for them by "[serving] on the inmate advisory council, organizing special events and bringing grievances to the warden" (Warren, 2006, p. A12). The overall narrative demonstrates a great contrast between Olson's current life and her previous life as an SLA member, which was filled with bombs, bank robberies, and murder. After completing the article, readers are left wondering whether they should really be afraid of an offender who "nervously tiptoes through each day while awaiting that moment in 2009 when she'll go home to her husband and daughters in Minnesota" (Warren, 2006, p. A1).

While reporters indicate that some women are capable of turning their lives around, other women have absolutely no hope for reformation; these women will always be criminals. Figure 2 indicates that this technique of exacerbation was applied in a racially disparate manner. Whereas 21.7 percent of the stories about white female offenders described them as unlikely to change, an incredible 54.2 percent of the stories about minority females noted that they were incapable of reform. With regard to minority women, a *New York Times* story about Debra Harris and a *Los Angeles Times* story about Bertha Cuestas both provided explanations of how reformation was not likely or possible. What is interesting about these two stories is that the format was exactly the same, despite the fact that the articles were written about two completely different women, in two different newspapers, at two different times of the year.

The *Los Angeles Times* story about Cuestas, a Latina offender, described how she had repeatedly been arrested for drug offenses and prostitution; she "had been arrested 21 times" and "knew the drill" (Garvey & Leonard, 2006, p. A1). Police officers added that she had been arrested "too many times" (Garvey & Leonard, 2006, p. A1). Other law enforcement officials were quoted as saying that laws "give longtime chronic offenders like Cuestas too many chances to reoffend with little consequences" (Garvey & Leonard, 2006, p. A22). The story from the *New York Times* described how Harris, an African-American female, was recently arrested because she provided a dirty urine sample during a final visit with her parole officer. Before this parole violation, "she had been imprisoned three times over the years" (Eckholm, 2006, p. A12). After acquainting the reader with Cuestas and Harris, reporters from both papers then discussed minority male offenders arrested for drug offenses. These drug offenders, like Cuestas and Harris, were no strangers to the criminal justice system. After drawing this parallel, the reporters ended with ominous predictions of future criminality. The *New York Times* article provided a concluding quote from Harris: "'In some ways, I feel like I'm back in the same old spot. [House arrest] keeps my life structured for now. It's crazy out there'" (Eckholm, 2006, p. A12). The implication is that without oversight from the criminal justice system, she will be unable to resist criminal temptation. The ending of the story from the *Los Angeles Times* was more dramatic because it contained the following: "Postscript: [by the time this article was finished and ready for the press] Cuestas was rearrested for failing to appear in court" (Garvey & Leonard, 2006, p. A22).

Discussion and Conclusion

Few have considered how a female offender's race/ethnicity may impact media coverage. Such a consideration is important given the prevalence of negative racial/ethnic stereotypes in American society. However, to date, only four studies of how media portrayals may differ for minority women versus white women have been published (Bond-Maupin, 1998; Farr, 1997, 2000; Huckerby, 2003). Findings from these studies suggest that white women are more likely than their minority counterparts to have their behavior excused in some way. But, these findings may not be generalizable to female offenders as a whole given that Huckerby (2003) focused on two cases of maternal filicide, Farr (1997, 2000) examined women on death row, and Bond-Maupin (1998) considered women who were largely on the run from authorities for violent offenses.

We, therefore, conducted an exploratory study to examine whether minority female offenders were portrayed less favorably by the media than white female offenders. We examined all calendar year 2006 front-page news stories about female offenders from the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*. Both actual and alleged reports of crime were analyzed. About an equal number of the stories were found about white and minority women.

We believed that newspaper reporters would excuse the behavior of some women by relying on various "techniques of neutralization." These techniques, which were largely borrowed from Sykes and Matza (1957), included denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victimization, condemnation of the condemners, appeal to higher loyalties, and reformation through disengagement. The presence or absence of these neutralizers was coded for all the stories under investigation. We then determined whether the stories took on an overall favorable tone based on our assessment of the extent of emphasis placed on one or more neutralizer(s). Likewise, we believed that some stories would take on a predominately negative tone due to emphasis placed on one or more exacerbating characteristic(s). Stories that attributed guilt to the offender, focused on real injury and a real victim, discussed an offender's self-interested motives, praised the apprehension of the offender by law enforcement or other social service agents, and/or suggested that reform was not possible were, generally speaking, much more negative.

We found that stories about white female offenders were more likely to contain neutralizers and were, therefore, more likely to be overwhelmingly favorable than stories about minority female offenders. Specifically, stories

about white women were nearly three times more likely to be favorable than stories about minority women. The "Denial of Responsibility" neutralizer, in particular, was much more likely to be present in stories about white women than in stories about minority women.

An opposite conclusion was reached when we examined how race/ethnicity was related to stories that were overwhelmingly unfavorable. Specifically, while two-thirds of the stories about minority women were predominantly negative, only about one-quarter of the stories about white women had a similar tone. The technique of exacerbation that was most likely to be applied in a racially disparate manner was "No Hope for Reformation." Compared to the stories about white females, more than two times as many of the stories about minority females noted that they were incapable of reform.

Our study fills an important void in the existing literature of media depictions of offenders. Much of the extant literature treats race/ethnicity and sex as two distinct variables. This means that distinctions among women are not (and cannot be) considered in most other studies. Our research findings indicated that media portrayals of minority women differed from those of white women; differences among women should be considered when one examines discussions of their criminality. Our research also differs from other studies in that our sample was not confined to women who committed violent offenses. Instead, the stories included in this study were about women who committed a wide array of actual or alleged offenses; only about half the stories in our sample were about women who engaged in acts of violence. Our finding that front-page newspaper stories were also about females who committed white-collar offenses, drug offenses, and immigration offenses (to name a few) seems to reject the often-cited notion that reporters focus their attention on violent women who kill their children or intimate male partners.

While this study helps to fill a void in the existing literature, it is not without its own limitations. One of these limitations is that while a sample of 47 newspaper stories may be construed as relatively large, it may still be too small to allow one to generalize these findings to a larger context. We put forth the proposition that further research on this topic should be conducted using the same methodology as this study, but with a greater number of newspapers gathered from different geographical regions of the United States and from different countries. The benefits of such an approach would be twofold. First, a greater number of stories from more newspapers would yield a much larger sample size, which may help provide further support for

the conclusions drawn in this study. Second, future researchers may be able to examine what differences in reporting style, if any, exist throughout the United States and/or in other countries.

We further advise future researchers to consider how the packaging of crime stories (e.g., headline size, use of photographs, story length) may differ for white women versus minority women. While scholars have examined how certain crime stories receive more or less print media attention (Berrington et al., 2002; Chermak, 1998; Grabe et al., 2006; Naylor, 2001), there has not yet been a study of how presentations may differ specifically for female offenders. Future scholars should also think about whether (and how) the type of offense may condition depictions of female offenders.

Armstrong (1999, p. 68) argued that violent women are especially likely to be viewed as challenging societal expectations about crime and femininity. Berrington and Honkatukia (2002) made a similar argument when they reported that "[w]omen commit few acts of violence, but when they do this is highly publicized. Its newsworthiness is enhanced by the rarity of such behaviour (sic) and the challenge it poses to the dominant perceptions and stereotypes" (p. 57). Chesney-Lind (1988) adds that when a "violent woman is vigorously, and publicly, demonized…her experience will serve as a cautionary tale to all women about the profound risks associated with women accessing strategies of male violence" (p. 134). These contentions may not apply equally to white and minority female offenders given our review of the extant empirical literature. Specifically, recall that Bond-Maupin (1999), Farr (1997, 2000), and Huckerby (2003) found that violent white women were more likely than violent minority women to have their behavior excused in some way. [11] Future researchers should examine this possibility more closely. Moreover, given that so much of the extant empirical literature focuses solely on violent offending, future scholars would also be wise to consider whether differential media treatment exists among female offenders who commit non-violent offenses.

[11] Given the limited extant empirical research on media depictions of white versus minority female offenders and our small sample size we did not conduct offense-specific analyses for this study. However, a preliminary subsequent statistical examination of the stories for women who committed violent offenses indicated that violent minority women were more likely to be depicted less favorably than violent white women (table not shown). In contrast, stories about violent white female offenders were more likely to contain neutralizers and were, therefore, more likely to have an overall favorable tone than stories about minority women who committed violent offenses (table not shown). In other words, our overall conclusions were not altered when focus was placed on stories about violent female offenders.

Examinations of media depictions of offenders are important because what the media do may affect criminal justice outcomes. Journalists "[update] society's consensual views on morality by publicly defining what is right and wrong, [and] innocence and guilt" (Grabe, 1999, p. 158). Therefore, with regard to offenders, media outlets, including newspapers, paint a mental picture of the types of offenders worthy of leniency. Overall, we found that minority female offenders were depicted less favorably than white female offenders in front-page news stories in both the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*. This finding may help explain reports of unfavorable treatment of minority female offenders by the criminal justice system. Visher (1983), for example, found that black female suspects were more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts. And, with regard to court processing outcomes, in two separate examinations of sentencing decisions in Pennsylvania, Steffensmeier and his colleagues (1993, 1998) found that black females were more likely to be incarcerated and for longer periods than white females. Furthermore, a recent Bureau of Justice Statistics report indicates that black women are about three times more likely to be incarcerated than white women (Sabol, Couture, & Harrison, December 2007, p. 8). Whether and how the media influence criminal justice outcomes is yet another area worthy of future research.

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Appendix A: Summary of Studies That Focus on Depictions/Perceptions of Female Offenders

Author	Sample/Method	Focus
Armstrong (1999)	Court cases for 29 males, 29 females	The relative frequency of female offenders receiving psychiatric sentences compared to males accused of the same crimes
Ballinger (1996)	Case study (2 female murderers)	Examination of newspapers and trial transcripts to determine how each woman's adherence to, or violation of, gender stereotypes influenced the court outcome
Barnett (2006)	Case study (10 females who killed their children)	Journalistic use of recurring narratives and myths to explain maternal violence
Berrington & Honkatukia (2002)	Case study (2 female murderers)	Whether violent crimes by females are easier to accept when the offender adheres to gender stereotypes
Bond-Maupin (1998)	Content analysis of television stories for nine female offenders	Depictions of female offenders on *America's Most Wanted* and how such depictions influence perceptions of crime committed by females
Chesney-Lind (1999)	Literature review with anecdotal support from specific news stories	A comparison of the frequency, nature, and characteristics of violent females presented by the media versus actual statistics
Edwards (1986)	Literature review with anecdotal support from specific news stories	Whether a violent female offender's treatment by the criminal justice system changes depending on her adherence to gender stereotypes
Farr (1997)	Content analysis of media reports, court summaries, telephone conversations, academic publications, and information from capital punishment centers for 35 females on death row	How cases were portrayed by the media and in court, and factors that differentiated cases for white women versus minority women

Appendix A continued on next page

Appendix a (cont.): Summary of Studies that Focus on Depictions/Perceptions of Female Offenders

Author	Sample/Method	Focus
Farr (2000)	Case study (5 females on death row)	Media depictions of lesbian offenders and how homosexual stereotypes may have influenced their capital sentences
Grabe, Trager, Lear, & Rauch (2006)	Content analysis of 2,281 crime stories from one newspaper over a 6-month period	Examination of the packaging of crime stories (e.g., headline size, use of photographs) to test whether female offenders are treated more leniently than male offenders
Huckerby (2003)	Case study (2 females)	The influence of race, culture, class, marital status, and health-related issues on media depictions of women who kill their children
Naylor (2001)	Content analysis of 1,727 newspaper articles from four newspapers over a 6-month period	How explanations of violent crime differ for male versus female offenders
Van Brunschot, Sydie, & Krull (1999)	1,389 articles gathered from five newspapers over a 5-year period	Examination of media themes associated with prostitution
Wilczynski (1991)	Content analysis of newspaper reports, law reports, coupled with court observations and interviews with probation officers and psychiatrists regarding 22 females who killed their children	Determinants of a "bad" or "mad" label for women who kill their children
Willemsen & van Schie (1989)	Surveys with differing scenarios given to 709 adolescents and 524 adults	Whether gender stereotypes influence perceptions of crime and punishment for male versus female offenders

Appendix B: Stories Gathered From The *New York Times* 2006

Date	Headline
January 10, 2006	More and More, Women Risk All to Enter U.S.
January 13, 2006	Long Chain of Alarms Preceded Death of Girl, 7
January 15, 2006	Forgotten Survivors of Abuse
January 31, 2006	4-Year-Old Bronx Boy Is Dead; Family Was Being Investigated
February 11, 2006	95 Pounds Heavier, Angry Son Faces Mother Who Starved Him
February 20, 2006	Dizzying Rise and Abrupt Fall For a Reservation Drug Dealer
March 15, 2006	Lawyer Thrust Into Spotlight After Misstep in Terror Case
April 22, 2006	C.I.A. DISMISSES A SENIOR OFFICER OVER DATA LEAKS
June 5, 2006	Girl Sought in Abduction
July 19, 2006	Patient Deaths In New Orleans Bring Arrests
August 12, 2006	Help for the Hardest Part of Prison: Staying Out
August 16, 2006	Corzine's Attorney General Out in Ethics Breach
September 23, 2006	Chairwoman Leaves Hewlett In Spying Furor
September 23, 2006	As Time Stands Still in Court, Justice for a Broken Girl Waits
September 28, 2006	U.S. INVESTIGATING PIRRO DISCUSSION OF TAPING SPOUSE
September 29, 2006	Hewlett's Hunt for Leak Became a Game of Clue
September 29, 2006	Pirro & Pirro, a Partnership Of Love, Power and Distrust
October 5, 2006	EX-CHAIRWOMAN AMONG 5 CHARGED IN HEWLETT CASE
October 10, 2006	A History of Sex With Students, Unchallenged Over the Years

Appendix C: Stories Gathered From The *Los Angeles Times* 2006

Date	Headline
January 10, 2006	European Women Join Ranks of Jihadis
January 11, 2006	Plot Thickens in the Case of the Tainted Detective
January 23, 2006	King/Drew Hits Hard at Problem Personnel
February 2, 2006	A Postal Worker's Erratic Behavior
February 11, 2006	Plan Puts Female Inmates in Centers by Their Families
February 13, 2006	A Child's Death Reveals a System's Tragic Flaw
April 19, 2006	A Bright Career Unravels in Iraq
April 29, 2006	On the Run From Hatred
May 19, 2006	2 Arrested in Homeless Life Insurance Scam
May 20, 2006	Scam Probe Tries to Link Women to More Deaths
June 2, 2006	Taking of Baby Is Called Kidnapping, Adoption
June 8, 2006	3rd Death Probed in Insurance Scam Case
July 19, 2006	3 Arrested in Katrina Hospital Deaths
July 21, 2006	Fury Meets Katrina Hospital Arrests
July 27, 2006	L. A. Area Leads in Employers That Aren't
July 27, 2006	Andrea Yates Not Guilty in Children's Deaths
August 14, 2006	A Life on Hold in Prison
August 19, 2006	Jones Is the Latest to Fail a Drug Test
August 19, 2006	An Unlikely Friendship That Finally Unraveled
August 20, 2006	Labeled as Winners - and as Rule-Breakers
August 27, 2006	What Drove the Preacher's Wife?
August 29, 2006	They Say I Ate My Father. But I Didn't
September 7, 2006	Second Doping Test Clears Jones
September 7, 2006	State Probes HP's Spying on Directors
September 8, 2006	Spiraling Scandal Engulfs Tech Icon
September 20, 2006	'Sweet Lady' Hid Nazi Past
September 23, 2006	HP Chairwoman Out in Spy Flap; CEO Contrite
September 29, 2006	House Panelists Rail at HP
October 5, 2006	Lockyer Charges 5 in HP Scandal
November 23, 2006	8 youths are charged with hate crime in Long Beach
December 11, 2006	Athletes see doping case appeals as futile exercise
December 13, 2006	*Dark end to a hunt for love*
December 19, 2006	QUESTIONS STILL SHROUD LONG BEACH ASSAULT
December 26, 2006	Why L.A. jail cells have revolving doors
December 29, 2006	Once notorious, now footnotes