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Paper Women: The Representation of Female Offenders in Irish Newspapers

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The Representation of Female Offenders in Irish Newspapers

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the **Masters in Criminology** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assignment other than part fulfilment of the award named above.

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Abstract

Reductionistic definitions characterise many of the representations of women in our society. From superficial depictions of women as sex objects to the elevation of motherhood as a paragon of womanhood, women navigate myriad roles available to them exclusively because of their gender. Female offenders are potentially more vulnerable to such limitations of representation due to their relative invisibility. Society is largely unacquainted with the realities of circumstance for such women, who are therefore reliant upon media outlets to inform the public. The operation of this process in Ireland has not been the subject of extensive research, and the current study attempts to address this. Through a content analysis of the output of four newspapers over a one-month period, the representation of female offenders in Irish newspapers was found to be similarly reliant on familiar narratives. Female offenders were consistently represented in terms of their gender; the themes which emerged were broadly compatible with the various aspects of femininity as it is socially constructed and understood.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Summary

The structure of this dissertation is presented in the following paragraph. Chapter one presents the rationale and the research questions of the study. Chapter two explores the relevant literature. Chapter three outlines the logistical and epistemological features of the study such as the specific research design. Chapter four contains the findings from the research, interwoven with a discussion of their implications. Chapter five provides the conclusions and recommendations which can be made from the research.

1.2 Rationale and Research Aims

The media are an influential institution; they have a pervasive presence in modern society and the capacity to interpret and construct reality. They are therefore pivotal in the public perception of crime.

Societal perception and reaction are important in any consideration of social phenomenon; Becker's (1966) labelling theory stated that *society* created deviance. Social constructionism probed the interplay between media and crime and exposed the media's capacity to construct meaning through their representation of persons and events (Hall et al, 1978).

The inception of cultural criminology heralded the dawning recognition that a study of crime would also entail a study of the *representation* of crime (Ferrell, 2006).

Crime reporting is so influential as to merit comprehensive research. Yet the integration of gender and crime reporting has received relatively little attention (Pollak and Kubrin, 2007).

Inaccurate reporting can have negative repercussions. This is especially so for the 'hidden' population of female offenders, only glimpsed through the media (Carlen, 1983). Cecil (2007c) argues that 'get tough' policies succeed because they have the support of a public misled by atypical representations of crime. The US and Ireland now

share many cultural touchstones and those crime dramas which form the subject of Cecil's (2007c) US-based research are available on Irish television (Coakley, 2005).

In an Irish context, recent years have witnessed the growth of the 'true crime' market with many titles detailing cases of Irish female offenders (McCaffrey, 2007; O'Connor, 2000). The 'true crime' genre seeks general readership and favours gripping descriptions of criminal events (Leo, 2005). Due to the popularity of 'true crime' it has the capacity to shape public opinion. In light of such publishing trends, the researcher believes a study of the representation of female offenders in Irish newspapers is pertinent.

While research is available on general crime reporting in Irish newspapers (O'Connell, 1999), there is no research specifically concerned with the representation of female offenders. Existing research hails from other jurisdictions, notably the UK and the US. Recent research carried out in Northern Ireland (Gordon, 2008 unpublished) together with O'Connell's (1999) general findings provides an indication of how female offenders *may* be represented in Irish newspapers. The current study aims to provide a comprehensive account of this phenomenon.

1.3   *Research Questions*

- How are female offenders represented in the Irish press?

- Are there noticeable themes which emerge as typical of the representation of female offenders in the Irish press?

- Are there differential reporting styles between the Irish tabloid and Irish broadsheet press regarding the representation of female offenders?

2.   Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

Female offending is represented in a different way to male offending; offences receive differential treatment in the media than do offences that have been committed by men. Offending females are provided with a narrow range of roles within which to identify themselves; this range of roles is used to communicate the scenario to the consumer in an accessible way; stereotypes make stories instantly familiar to the public. The literature review will identify trends in the reporting of female offenders through broad reading of the research on the topic. Further, the media's influence in society will be analysed together with the means by which news is made.

Worrall (1990) cited the concepts of domesticity, sexuality and pathology as those most commonly used by criminal justice professionals in their representation of female offenders. Such official voices are influential because journalists rely on them as reputable sources (Gordon, 2008 unpublished; Naylor, 2001).

Naylor (1995) studied the representation of violent female offenders and found a reliance on familiar narratives. She reported that a limited range of stock stories were used: Madonna/whore; sexual passion as motivation; reproduction and madness; the figure of evil; the criminal woman as 'non-woman'; and, the female as manipulative. These categories reflect Worrall's (1990) concepts of domesticity, sexuality and pathology.

Conboy (2006) observed that 'women become news with less frequency than men' (p.123), and when they did they were frequently portrayed in a sexualised manner. In the tabloids women were relegated to 'lifestyle' sections (Tuchman, 1981), while in broadsheets the absence of trivial stories rendered them invisible.

However, while '[s]ex and violence saturate contemporary popular culture in Britain' (Wykes, 2001: 138) this phenomenon cannot be assumed to exist in Ireland to the same extent. Conboy (2006) claims a British tradition of representing women through such devices as sexualised seaside postcards and *Carry On* movies. It will be of interest to explore how this corresponds to the Irish experience.

2.2   Female Violence in the Media

Female violence, while rare, is over-reported in the media (Boulahanis and Heltsley, 2004); those offences for which women are typically convicted are under-represented (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004). The following paragraphs provide evidence and explanations for this fascination with violent female offenders.

Cecil (2007a), studied images of women in prison, and suggests that violence 'excites' the viewer. Almost 66 per cent of those inmates shown had been incarcerated for violent offences, twice as many as the official statistics showed. It is questionable how far the US and Irish penal estates and depiction of such have in common however, and Cecil's (2007a) sample size is relatively small. In another piece of research, Cecil (2007c) examined a representative sample of crime dramas to assess the portrayal of violent women and found that once again it was the atypical offenders who were most frequently shown. Women were over-endowed with agency and presented unsympathetically. Unlike male offenders, violent female offenders were found only in a limited range of roles, narratives easily comprehensible by viewers. The crime dramas selected for study by Cecil (2007c) are available on Irish television and therefore contribute to the cultural map of our society. However, it must be assumed that depictions in entertainment-oriented crime dramas will differ from newspapers.

Serious crime committed by women presents 'compelling images of crime and deviance' (Heidensohn, 1996: 86). Heidensohn states that the rarity of female violence arouses public interest.

Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2004) highlight the fact that the most prevalent crimes for women and girls are status offences and shoplifting, and claim that many coping strategies for marginalised girls are criminalised (see also Smart, 1976).

The reporting of intimate murders in the British media was considered by Wykes (1995) who found that such events were incredibly newsworthy. The proximity of British and Irish media should be noted (Coakley, 2005) and Wykes' findings are relevant to the Irish situation. Women and men accused of similar crimes were afforded differential treatment by the media; the contradiction of women killing intimate partners was resolved through the demonisation of such women (Mann, 1996; Wykes, 1995).

2.3   A General Look at Violence in the Media

The prevalence for stories concerned with violent offending is not restricted to women. Mason (2006) claims that violence generally is depicted voyeuristically in the British media.

In an Irish context the propensity for newspapers to over-report violent offences was found by O'Connell (1999) who claimed that the public perception of levels of crime was considerably higher than reality and argued that 'a plausible explanation for the public misconception is the distorted image of crime in the media' (p.191). His findings exposed four patterns in crime reporting: over-reporting of atypical and serious offences; increased space given to such stories; preference for stories with vulnerable victims and invulnerable offenders; and, negative accounts of the criminal justice system. O'Connell's research is extremely relevant to the current study and his chosen research method should render the results capable of comparison. In light of highly publicised cases of female offenders in Ireland, the research currently being undertaken could reveal if there has been a reversal of the bias towards invulnerable offenders, towards a new preference for reporting the crimes of women.

Violence is newsworthy because it is portrayed as a threat to the social order (Hall et al, 1978). Yet while crime is disruptive, it is also often of a minor nature and therefore atypical crime such as violence is awarded a higher news value (Duwe, 2000; Graber, 1994).

2.4   Sexuality

When female offending is portrayed in the media, it is often done so in a sexualised manner. This section demonstrates the ways offending women have been defined by their sexuality.

Heidensohn (1996) claims that many crimes are transformed into expressions of female sexuality; crimes such as kleptomania and pre-menstrual tension-induced violence are all portrayed as expressions of female sexuality.   These theories of the dangerous

reproductive organs were widely popularised throughout the Victorian ages and into the twentieth century (Appignanesi, 2008). In an Irish context, sexual deviancy was the motivating factor in the detention of girls in the past (O'Sullivan, 1998). This highlights the centuries-old demonisation of female sexuality.

Modern depictions of female criminals are also sensationalised and designed to titillate, hence an interest in lesbians (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006) and female prisoners (Cecil, 2007a).

Bond-Maupin (1998), in her analysis of *America's Most Wanted*, found that sexuality was highlighted when portraying female fugitives; either as a powerful tool, or as hidden and leading to their undoing in the case of lesbians. However the applicability of depictions in such US entertainment programming to depictions in Irish newspapers is debatable.

Mason (2006) cites prison exploitation movies of the 1970s and claims that these depicted women in a limited number of ways. Similarly, Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) refer to the accounts of female homosexuality in prison which emerged in the 1930s; depictions of 'masculinised' female criminals led to the demonisation of lesbians. In her study of contemporary images of female prisoners, Cecil (2007a) found that the issue of sex 'was highlighted in such a way as to take the forefront to all of the issues facing women in prison' (p.320). A sensationalised image of women behind bars was presented. This obscured issues such as 'mental health problems, educational difficulties, drug and alcohol related issues and sexual abuse' (Scraton and Moore, 2005: 7).

The interest in the sexuality of female offenders is also prominent in the news media. Gordon (2008, unpublished) documented the focus on her subject's physical appearance and sexuality, a perception which was linked to accusations the woman had been manipulative. Gordon's (2008, unpublished) Northern Irish-based research has particular relevance to the current study, due to the overlap of much British and Irish media, and her use of two Irish newspapers in the study.

Wykes' (2001) study of intimate partner murder provides a British example of the use of sexual innuendo in reporting. One woman found herself the subject of stigmatising stories and was 'being tried not only as a criminal but as a woman' (Wykes, 2001: 149).

When female offenders are portrayed in the media, it provides an opportunity for sexual innuendo, which is generally lacking in the reporting of male offenders.

2.5   The Ideal of Womanhood

Deviation from restrictive notions of femininity renders women problematic. Culture has delineated the tolerable expressions of femininity and these are accepted by the public and maintained by the media. Images of conforming versus deviant women in the media provide a cue for how the public should respond.

> *Popular media masculinize and demonize a few women, effectively casting them out of the 'protected' sphere of femininity, while celebrating the assumed passivity of the rest of womanhood* (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006: 43)

Stories of female offenders are frequently shaped as moral fables (Cecil, 2007a; Heidensohn, 1996).

Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2004) outline the differential responses to female and male offending, claiming that some degree of aggression in males is normalised and accepted.

Heidensohn (1996) refers to the Madonna/whore problem of depicting women; women are vilified if they cannot be identified as 'good'. The depiction of women as witches is one of the earliest examples (Naylor, 2001; Heidensohn, 1996). The concept of the deviant woman as non-woman was also a staple when depicting the non-conforming woman (Heidensohn, 1996).

Cecil (2007b) analysed newspaper coverage of Martha Stewart's incarceration and found a dichotomous image of womanhood presented; Stewart was portrayed as the paragon of ideal womanhood, yet was depicted as having received her 'just deserts' because her phenomenal success was considered unfeminine. Cecil's (2007b) research highlights the vastly different penal estates of Ireland and the US; however while such elements may not be comparable to Ireland, press coverage of female offenders and the themes may be. For example, Cecil's (2007b) findings regarding the concentration on her subject's

physical appearance supports Gordon's (2008, unpublished) findings from a study based in Northern Ireland.

Seal (2009) analysed how Edith Chubb was heralded as the archetypal wife and mother and was contrasted with her victim, an unmarried, childless woman, dramatised as the antithesis of womanhood; this case documented the perverse demonisation of the victim.

2.6   Perceived Coldness

As with the case of Edith Chubb (Seal, 2009), the media are instrumental in cultivating public opinion. Cavaglion (2008) reported, in her study of maternal filicide, that many indicators of emotion have been negatively interpreted by the media.

There have been high-profile cases of women facing censure in the media due to their perceived lack of emotion; notable examples include Kate McCann, Joanne Lees and Lindy Chamberlain (Lawson, 2007; Bone, 2004; Barkham, 2001). In each of these cases the suspicion which fell on the woman was bolstered by her perceived coldness. The idea of a prescribed female reaction is linked to the idealised view of women and their emotionality. It is noticeable that mothers who deviate from expected roles receive harsh condemnation.

2.7   The Ideal of Motherhood

Motherhood is the paragon of womanhood in our society; the female body is the maternal body. Deviation from this is a societal taboo. This section delineates media representations of motherhood.

West and Lichtenstein (2006) explored the case of a woman convicted of maternal filicide and found that '[h]er criminal body was shocking to many people because it violated not only a socially constructed ideology of motherhood but also a seemingly natural law of womanhood' (p.185).

Naylor (2001) also examined the issue of motherhood in the case of a woman charged with maternal filicide. Arguments that the accused was intellectually disabled were dismissed by the media who believed that the maternal instinct occurred naturally. The

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woman's inability to be selfless was represented as unnatural, yet the father seemed immune to censure despite his abandonment of the family.

Cecil (2007c) found it was rare in a crime drama to portray maternal filicide, suggesting that this would have rendered the character too unsympathetic.

Gordon (2008, unpublished) found that motherhood featured strongly as a theme in the press. Gordon's subject, through her role as a mother, became even more abject.

Bond-Maupin (1998) claims that female fugitives depicted on *America's Most Wanted* were contrasted with expected gender roles. The feminine characteristics of female victims were contrasted with the unfeminine characteristics of female offenders. In addition, when the issue of motherhood was added it was found that '[g]ood mothering mitigates moral outrage' (p.43) and redeemed the women in the viewers' eyes. Cecil (2007c) also found that signs of maternal love were used to neutralise the perceived threat of a female offender.

2.8   *Psychological Issues*

There is evidence to support the view that female offenders are more likely to be labelled mentally ill than male offenders. For example, infanticide is a crime only capable of being committed by a woman because of the 'disturbance caused by the stress of birth' (Charleton et al, 1999: 527). The ensuing paragraphs provide a glimpse of research on the labelling of female offenders as mentally ill.

Cavaglion (2008) states that there are familiar narratives which the public recognise and which journalists use to report a story, such as the stereotypical 'mad woman'. Cavaglion contended that mothers who killed were more likely to be viewed as suffering from mental disorders than fathers who killed, more amenable to cure than punishment. While West and Lichtenstein (2006) found otherwise the disparities between these findings could be explained by reference to the differential penal policies and media of their respective jurisdictions.

If female offenders are portrayed as mentally ill, their agency is reduced. Morrissey (2003) claims that the differential treatment of female and male offenders has its roots in the fear of women in patriarchal societies; women possess the power to give life, when

they kill this duality of power becomes incomprehensible. Morrissey argues that women who kill are pathologised or demonised, through the use of familiar narratives such as the mad woman, or the evil seductress, and stresses the need for a new model which restores agency. When women are aggressive or criminal they are labelled as evil, mentally ill or as victims and this limited range of roles obscures complexities and denies agency (Peter, 2006).

Worrall (1990) highlighted the influence of professional opinion on media reporting. Similarly, the representation of female offenders in professional reports was the subject of Allen's (1998) study; she discovered a tendency to attribute violent behaviour to mental illness. Professional judgements were used to 'frame' a different conception of the woman. She found this to be in contrast to the treatment of men. Women were believed to respond better through the imposition of the informal social controls of marriage and family. Thus the image of women as 'passive, ineffectual, unstable and irresponsible' (Allen, 1998: 64) was reinforced.

A professional willingness to label female offenders as mentally ill cannot be said to translate entirely to the media. Naylor (2001) documented the gradual shift in the representation of a mother accused of maternal filicide from 'bad' to 'sad'. She found that the media were less willing to accept the legal representation of the mother as mentally ill. Added factors made the story increasingly complex and less appealing.

Smart (1976) was an early opponent of biological determinism. She claimed that there were those who said criminal women must be mentally ill, which denied them agency and treated crime as an individual rather than a social problem. Alternatively, there was the view that mental illness was 'a form of deviant behaviour appropriate to women, fulfilling the same needs or functions as criminal behaviour does for men' (Smart, 1976: 146). Smart claimed that violence perpetrated by men was typically viewed as a rational alternative to structural conditions, whereas violence perpetrated by women was viewed as irrational.

2.9 Feminist Critique and Reaction

'The backlash against women's rights…charges feminists with all the crimes it perpetrates' (Faludi, 1992: 17). One of the key elements of 'backlash' was the 'emancipation' hypothesis which claimed that liberated women were attempting to compete with men in the commission of criminal acts; many were convinced that women's liberation resulted in more crime. The 'emancipation' hypothesis, as advocated by Adler (1975), was an unthinkable proposition for many feminists who felt that the blame for female offending lay with the patriarchy.

It is conceivable that the 'backlash' has influenced the portrayal of female offenders, which renders it relevant to the current study. This section aims to provide insight into how this 'backlash' could impact on the representation of female offenders.

The 'bad girl' was always a staple of 'backlash' journalism (Faludi, 1992). Pollock and Davis (2005) claim that periodically 'a journalist in the print or electronic media decides that there is a news story in exposing the increasing violence of women or girls' (p. 6). The influence of the media in fuelling 'backlash' thinking has been well documented (Chesney-Lind, 2006) with frequent reports demonising criminal women.

Early articles questioned the 'emancipation' hypothesis (Curran, 1984; James and Thornton, 1980). Yet, Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2004) claim that it still lingers in the public mind and finds frequent expression in the media; they cite (along with Faludi, 1992) the responsibility of the police for popularising the idea of the new and violent female offender. The 'emancipation' hypothesis is typically supported by analysis of arrest and conviction data, when overall increases are taken as measurements rather than a percentage increase in women's *share* of crime. This was the criticism which formed the basis of Box and Hale's (1983, cited in Heidensohn, 1996: 157) dispute with the hypothesis; absolute increases were misleading.

Feminists counsel one to be aware that the press itself is an institution within the patriarchy and therefore complicit in such patriarchal attitudes (Wykes, 1995). The media reinforce patriarchal attitudes. Butcher (1981) claims that the two-dimensional nature of media representation results in the fragmentation of women into uninspired, mutually exclusive categories, such as wife or whore.

2.10   Media and Crime

The interdisciplinary study of the relationship between media and crime owes much to the emergence of cultural criminology (Hayward and Young, 2007). The growth of the mass media in the late modern era has redefined how we view and interact with the world. Simultaneously with the development of a pervasive mass media, the growth of the sociology of deviance and social constructionism saw individuals like Becker (1966) and Cohen (2002) delve into the importance of representation and meaning. The proceeding media-related sections outline the importance of media research for an understanding of social phenomena.

2.11   An Influential Media

The media are an influential institution. For many, they are the only source of information on topics which fall outside their personal experience (Graber, 1994; Barrat, 1986; Hall et al, 1978). O'Connell (1999) argues for recognition of the influence wielded by the media and finds a link between media representation of crime and public fear of crime. Similarly, Williams and Dickenson (1993) found that tabloids report more crime and their readers poll a higher fear of crime. Mason (2006) claims that the prison population is not determined by crime rates, but by political decision informed, in part, by inaccurate representations of crime. Hence the role of the media in presenting a picture of crime to the public is influential. Agenda-setting is one of the key roles of the media (Branston and Stafford, 2005; Critcher, 2003; McCombs and Reynolds, 2002; Hall et al, 1978).

What of the effects of such influence? An unfortunate consequence of labelling female criminals as violent is often a harsher criminal justice response (Cecil, 2007a; Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006; Curran, 1984). This is especially so with female prisoners, an unseen population dependant on the media to inform the public (Cecil, 2007a; Carlen, 1983).

Hall's (1997) social constructionist approach underlines the importance of representation and meaning while Pollak and Kubrin (2007) argue that reality is socially constructed and that the media can therefore affect perception.

The media are therefore pivotal in the construction of social problems. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) take up this point when they claim that '[t]he social construction of social concern…is revealed as much by the rise as the *demise*' (p.207) of the phenomenon, the media effectively constructs attitudes to certain crimes (Wright et al, 1995).

2.12   The Creation of News

There are 'rules' about what goes into a newspaper. It is not possible for all events to be reported at length, or even at all, and therefore *selection* of events is necessary.

> *The media do not simply and transparently report events which are 'naturally' newsworthy in themselves. 'News' is the end-product of a complex process...* (Hall et al, 1978: 53)

Hall et al (1978) claim this end-product is created by the application of 'news values'; stories are contextualised, 'maps of meaning' work because of the assumed consensus of the public. An example would be the assumed consensus that crime is undesirable and efforts should be made to reduce its occurrence; this framework is reinforced by how the media contextualise stories about crime. These 'maps of meaning' could equally be termed familiar narratives (Dahlgren, 1992). Critcher (2003) also refers to those 'news values' which are unarticulated but recognisable; these values are noted by many media researchers (Branston and Stafford, 2005; Barrat, 1986; Chibnall, 1981).

Within this hierarchy, atypical events receive more coverage (Cohen, 2002; Duwe, 2000). Cohen (2002) cites one of the causes of the Mods and Rockers moral panic as the lack of other news stories on the weekend of the first incident. Williams and Dickenson (1993) demonstrate that even within the category of crime, disproportionately more space is devoted to personal violent crimes. Within varying types of newspaper there exists disparity between reporting and there are typically more stories about crime in the tabloid press (Williams and Dickenson, 1993; Dahlgren, 1992). One-off criminal events are

more common in tabloids than 'quality' press, but there is more likelihood of finding a broader discussion of crime and its underlying causes in the 'quality' press (Reiner, 2007).

Reinforcing the media's power over perception is its capacity as interpreter (Cohen, 2002). Hall et al (1978) claim that the media apply labels and contextualise news which is presented to us as a simplified product.

The creation of news also owes much to the dominant ideology of the time. Hall et al (1978) claim this occurs through the media's reliance on 'primary definers', especially in the case of crime news (Graber, 1994; Barrat, 1986), due in part to resource and time limitations.

2.13   Moral Panic and the Perceived Threat to Society

The media play an influential role in shaping public opinion; they can also heighten public fears to such an extent that they become mobilised in moral panics (Cohen, 2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). These theories share many touchstones such as disproportionality, novelty and the use of stereotypes by the media. Barrat (1986) refers to stereotyping as a 'shorthand technique for conveying a complex idea' (p.45) which is crucial when imparting ideas through the media.

'Modern moral panics are unthinkable without the media' (Critcher, 2003: 131). For example, Seal (2009) studied the reaction to the case of Edith Chubb and found that the media were effective in marshalling the fear of the 'lazy spinster'. So influential were the attitudes espoused in the press that panic centred on the 'parasitic' single woman, rather than censure of her killer. Seal (2009) cites this as an example of a 'signal crime' (Innes, 2004a, 2004b, cited in Seal, 2009: 2) whereby a crime becomes the symbol of the degradation of society.

Heidensohn (1996) claims that the image of the deviant woman 'is more powerful and may leave a long-lasting impression' (p.89), suggesting that cases of atypical female violence are often seized upon by the media to illustrate the degeneration of society. Certainly, Wykes (2001) cites the abundance of news stories in the early 1990s, which dealt with the killing of intimate partners by women, as a fascination which spoke to the

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sensibilities of the time. Similarly, news frenzies about crack cocaine and girl gangs presented a compelling image for the public (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006; Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004; Humphries, 1998).

2.14   A Case of Moral Panic, Gender and Ethnicity

The following paragraphs provide an example of a moral panic surrounding female offending, and how this was conflated with conceptions of race. The panic emerged in the US in the 1980s and early 1990s. The fears centred on crack cocaine and young girls' participation in gang culture; within this moral panic, race emerged as a compounding factor (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006; Chesney-Lind and Pasko; 2004; Humphries, 1998). Poor, black women and girls were presented as the problem, without reference to underlying structural causes. The simplification of the issue resulted in an easily identifiable target for vilification.

Regarding the use of crack cocaine, Humphries (1998) found that white, middle-class female users were shown as receptive to treatment and lacking in agency. Poor, black women were portrayed less sympathetically as mindlessly addicted and knowingly endangering their unborn children.

Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) studied the depiction of girl gangs in the media. They claim that these stories reinforce the racism at the core of US society and criticise them for decontextualising the problem of girls' violence.

These examples illustrate the collision of gender and racial stereotypes. The phenomenon of how the media racialise certain crimes is not new. Hall et al (1978) note that the term 'mugging' was transplanted from the US as a symbol of white anxiety about a stereotypically 'black' crime. Cavaglion (2008), in the context of her work on maternal filicide in Israel, found that 'respectable' Jewish mothers were more likely to be portrayed as psychologically disturbed than Arab mothers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following sections outline the means by which the current study will be undertaken. They provide a discussion of the epistemological aspects of the research and an explanation of the rationale for and use of content analysis. The processes of sampling and analysis chosen for the current study will be outlined. An acknowledgement of the limitations of the study and paths for future research will be included together with a discussion of ethical concerns.

3.2 Epistemological Aspects

The research paradigm of the current study adheres to social constructionist thinking; the ontological underpinning posits that social reality is in a constant state of flux, and therefore there are no absolute meanings. Clarke (2006) defines social constructionism thus:

> *A perspective that explores the assumptions embedded in the labelling of people and places and emphasizes the importance of social expectations in the analysis of taken-for-granted or apparently natural social processes* (p.389).

Social constructionism rejects a realist tradition and invites researchers to consider their subjects from a higher vantage point, from where its construction and maintenance by society can be observed. It is naïve to talk of social reality, as one might discuss the reality of the 'hard' sciences.

Using inductive reasoning, theory shall be generated. The use of inductive reasoning in this instance is appropriate as little is known about the subject area, and therefore this exploratory nature is warranted (Berg, 1998). The study has elements of grounded theory approach which is traditionally associated with the inductive method and which prescribes that theory be generated from the data.

3.3 Content Analysis

3.3.1 Description

'Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context' (Krippendorff, 1980: 21). It analyses that which can be represented as text for the purposes of drawing certain inferences. Krippendorff (1980) highlights the web of symbolism which constitutes society and stresses the need for a research method which can deal with such phenomenon; the techniques common to the 'hard' sciences are unenlightening in such cases.

Key to the development of content analysis was the understanding that it necessarily entailed an interpretation of the data; this complimented the emerging social constructionist approach.

Due to its role as an influential reinforcer of societal norms, it is suggested that an analysis of the press would be likely to reveal something of the dominant ideology. Newspapers are not written solely to inform the reader of facts, sources do not spring into being naturally but are a product of their origins and moulded by the expected audience (Finnegan, 1998). Content analysis allows exploration of the dynamic relationship between the sender, the message and the receiver (Berg, 1998).

Content analysis is amenable to both quantitative and qualitative application; measurements of frequency combined with interpretation of content. Many researchers advise beginning with the quantitative aspect followed by the qualitative exploration of meaning (May, 2003; Bauer, 2000; Berg, 1998).

The context in which the data are analysed is crucial. The context in this case is the depiction of female offenders in Irish newspapers.

3.3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

Content analysis is a vicarious means of examining a phenomenon. Berg (1998) sees its strengths as a method in its unobtrusive nature; the researcher does not impact directly upon that which is under investigation, thus improving validity.

There are, of course, weaknesses of content analysis as a technique. Berelson (1952, cited in Krippendorff, 1980: 41) claims that inferences drawn from the frequency of words can be misleading. However, when used in the correct context, indices remain a useful tool for the researcher.

While useful, it should be stressed that inferences 'never yield absolute certainties' (Krippendorff, 1980: 99) and there are various means of ensuring greater accuracy such as statistical significance, contextual relevance and the existence of prior research supporting the inferences being made. The familiarity with theory is attained through a study of the literature on the subject; it is this theoretical grounding which strengthens the validity of inferences.

3.3.3 Coding

Coding is crucial in the production of meaningful inferences. The current study uses indices, variables 'whose significance in an investigation depends on the extent to which it can be regarded as a *correlate of other phenomena*' (Krippendorff, 1980:40). The use of indices resolves the question of how one is to measure those things which are not directly observable. Misogyny is not something for which there are easy indicators, for example, but speech can be monitored for pre-determined references which could infer a misogynist attitude. Further, the use or *favourable versus unfavourable references* impart judgements to the reader; Franzosi (2004) has highlighted the use of referential analysis in revealing the dominant ideological biases in text.

Coding is an iterative and time-consuming process. Data must initially undergo open coding, a process where the data is examined line by line and various emerging themes are identified. For example, within the current research such themes as sexuality and

motherhood could be expected. The caveat remains that while certain themes may be expected, in actuality they may not appear.

The next stage is the development of coding frames; 'coding frames are used to organize the data and identify findings after open coding has been completed' (Berg, 1998: 238).

3.4   Research Design

The research design of the current study has been developed so as to best operationalize the research questions. The research questions probe the depiction of female offenders in Irish newspapers and as such the relevant sources are Irish newspapers themselves. Due to the volume of titles, certain newspapers shall be selected and studied over a pre-determined period in a cross-sectional analysis so that the research questions can be applied to a sample set. The broad research questions reflect the exploratory nature of the current study.

Content analysis of four newspapers shall be carried out over a one-month period chosen as June 2009; the choice of June 2009 has no relevance beyond being an example of a typical month, coinciding with the commencement of data collection. Newspapers have been selected as the chosen medium due to the volume of articles within each issue, Wykes (2001) justified her decision to research only newspapers because 'there was more information just on the front page of a broadsheet than on the 9pm BBC1 News' (p.6). Hard copy newspapers, rather than archival or online material have been selected due to ability with hard copy to easily discern prominence of a story regarding headline size and space which cannot be seen online. Similarly, hard copy newspapers are providing a snapshot of *current* practice regarding the reporting of female offenders, rather than the archival sources.

News items concerning female offenders are the focus, to include:
- Items dealing with the arrest, charging, conviction or imprisonment of a female.
- Items dealing with female offenders in an Irish context, or international context.
- Items dealing with a specific instance of female offending or a broader piece discussing the phenomenon generally.

Issues of reliability and validity are central, validity can be both external and internal, the latter referring to issues of reliability. Validity refers to the soundness of the results, considering their place in the literature available. Reliability refers to the appropriateness of method and the inherent reproducibility of the findings.

Content analysis has been chosen as the most appropriate method; it can be seen from similar research that content analysis has been used to good effect (Gordon, 2008 unpublished; O'Connell, 1999)

3.5   Sampling

There are three issues regarding sampling: representativeness; sample size; and the unit of sampling and coding (Bauer, 2000). The relevant material necessary to address the research questions are newspapers. Due to the volume of such material and the inherent time limits it is hoped that a representative sample can be achieved. As Stempel (1952, cited in Bauer, 2000: 137) found, twelve randomly selected days are representative of a newspaper's observed characteristics over a year. The sampling unit in this instance shall be the newspaper itself, while the recording units are the relevant articles found within. The sample chosen should represent a range of opinions and reporting styles and therefore stratified sampling is the most appropriate technique. The newspapers chosen are the *Irish Times*, *Irish Daily Star*, *Evening Herald* and *Irish Independent*. It is hoped that this selection will cover the spectrum of reporting in Ireland, from tabloid to broadsheet.

The *Irish Times* is the 'quality' broadsheet newspaper of the country; it is one of the major dailies and appeals to middle and upper class readers. Its circulation in 1996 was 102,460 (Kelly and Truetzschler, 1997) rising to 115,462 in 2008 (ABC Electronic, 2009).

The *Irish Daily Star* is a tabloid newspaper in keeping with the style of British tabloids and formulated to compete with this growing market. It emerged in the late 1980s and in 1996 had circulation figures of 85,979 (Kelly and Truetzschler, 1997) rising to 105,000 in 2008 (Noonan, 2009).

The *Evening Herald* is a very popular national tabloid, featuring news and entertainment. Its circulation figures in 1996 were 113,024 (Kelly and Truetzschler, 1997) falling to 74,927 in 2008 (ABC Electronic, 2009).

The *Irish Independent* is Ireland's most popular newspaper and the most prominent national daily, straddling high and popular culture. Its circulation in 1996 was 160,032 (Kelly and Truetzschler, 1997) and 154,610 in 2008 (ABC Electronic, 2009).

While newspapers were generally established with an adherence to certain ideological viewpoints, the trend over the past three decades has seen a shift away from this tendency, towards anti-partisan reporting motivated by a concern with sales figures.

Stratified sampling has been used to select the newspapers in order 'to ensure that a certain segment of the identified population under examination is represented in the sample' (Berg, 1998: 229). Stratified sampling allows a true representation of the Irish national press.

Within the month of June 2009, the relevant newspapers from Monday to Saturday shall be included in the sample set. Sunday has been excluded as an attempt is being made to ensure an equal number of issues of each title. From Monday to Friday each newspaper title provides a daily edition. On Saturdays, there is an *Irish Daily Star*, an *Irish Times*, an *Irish Independent* and a *Weekend Herald*; this provides an equal number of titles are considered in the study. Twenty-six days shall be covered, which totals 104 individual newspapers.

3.6   Analysis

The data will be analysed through the creation of a coding scheme and consideration of the data will necessarily inform the coding framework. It is important to remember that because of the small sample size, one cannot generalise.

A unique number will be given to each article in order to aid analysis and the process of developing a coding scheme. The day shall be the first figure, expressed numerically. The newspapers shall be coded A to D and the chronological order of the article within that newspaper shall be the final figure, expressed numerically.

Features such as article distribution between newspapers, date and word count shall be recorded.

Absolute frequency, the total number of relevant articles, will be counted. The relative frequency will also be recorded, the number of relevant articles as a percentage of the total number of articles dealing with crime. Relative frequency will also be given in terms of the total number of articles dealing with female offenders as a percentage of the total number of articles dealing with women as victims of crime.

Features of the articles will be measured to provide a basic overview initially. Word count will indicate something about the prominence afforded various news stories. Format will provide insight on whether it was mere reportage or a considered opinion piece, the presence of such editorial or opinion pieces on a news story suggest a preoccupation beyond mere reportage. The content of the articles regarding the dominant action of the story is also to be recorded.

As outlined by Franzosi (2004) various types of analysis are applicable depending on the nature of the study. For the current research, a syntactical analysis will be used; this method is concerned primarily with the quantification of words and phrases and provides a basic overview of the text as broken down into numbers. Syntax encompasses the use of words and phrases and could be illustrated by the differing grammatical styles found in a tabloid as opposed to a broadsheet. Tabloid writing appeals to the speech of the common man and as such is noticeably different from the style of broadsheets.

A more detailed thematic analysis follows, using the coding techniques outlined above. Thematic analysis captures the prevalence of various themes. Also of relevance, and previously mentioned, Franzosi advocates referential analysis. 'Absorbed in its drive to quantify and to deal with large volumes of data, content analysis has typically had little taste and patience for the subtleties of language' (Franzosi, 2004: 553) but referential analysis seeks to remedy this.

3.7   Limitations and Future Study

There are pitfalls concerning the problem of selective observation; the researcher's own experience and belief-system are filters through which data is interpreted. Some degree of individual interpretation by the researcher cannot be avoided. Similarly, one must guard against illogical assumptions where unfounded inferences; potentially where one result is expected yet is not shown in the results.

'In the coding process, the coder's mind is a *black box*' (Franzosi, 2004: 561), something must remain unknowable despite explicit coding frameworks and clarity of method due to the interpretative nature of the work.

Future study could employ triangulation of data whereby different sources are mined for a broader understanding of the research problem. Interviews with journalists could shed light on the procedure by which stories are selected and presented in newspapers.

Potentially, future research could employ a different procedure regarding which newspaper dates are sampled, a move away from consecutive days could provide a typical month. This could be useful as it should be noted that during the month selected for investigation, there were other prominent news stories which may have influenced the space allotted to different categories of report. The European and local elections took place, and the continuing reporting of the financial situation occupied considerable space in newspapers. The construction of a month through a sample of random days could provide more information.

The subject matter could be broadened to encompass the analysis of the electronic media regarding the depiction of female offenders, notably the impact of the television media.

There are some female offenders who have provoked widespread public interest; the recent trend of Irish 'true crime' writing has highlighted those cases of particular interest (McCaffrey, 2007; O'Connor, 2000). In light of this phenomenon, it would be enlightening if the media representation of these specific female offenders were analysed. Such research would compliment the current study which seeks to provide a description and understanding of the representation of female offenders more generally, over a typical month.

Of particular interest however, it is felt that a longitudinal study could be enlightening, if carried out over a number of years the emergence of various trends in reporting female offenders could be mapped.

3.8   Ethics

The ethical touchstones of the research shall be the guiding principles of the Dublin Institute of Technology (Dublin Institute of Technology, 2008) and the Code of Ethics for Researchers provided by the British Society of Criminology (British Society of Criminology, 2008).

The researcher plays a large part in the type of research and analysis being undertaken, and it should be remembered that an ostensibly objective researcher will present their own biases and interpretation. This relates especially to the coding procedure.

However, due to the public nature of the sources there are no issues relating to confidentiality. Similarly, due to the unobtrusive nature of the research, there are few substantial ethical concerns. Krippendorff (1980) concedes that in research of this type, of a vicarious nature where the researcher cannot directly impact upon the phenomenon under scrutiny, there are scarce ethical considerations; warning is given however of the inherent bias of a researcher and the naïveté of assuming a researcher to be an impartial receiver of communication.

One of the aims inherent within ethical frameworks is to 'advance knowledge about criminological issues' (British Society of Criminology, 2008) and through the current research it is hoped that such ends shall be met.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 *Introduction*

The findings and discussion are incorporated in a single chapter; it is argued that this is appropriate considering the predominantly qualitative nature of the research. The findings and discussion from the syntactical analysis are presented first; the syntactical analysis dealt with that which could be expressed numerically. Following this, the findings and discussion relating to the in-depth thematic analysis shall be presented.

4.2 *Syntactical Analysis*

4.2.1 *Initial Information*

There were 234 articles in total. Within the sample, 157 are being transcribed for further analysis.

Table 4.1 Format of Articles

Format	Number of Articles
Reporting	229
Commentary	2
Review	2
Game	1

As can be seen from the Table 4.1, the vast majority of articles, 97.9 per cent, were reporting. This suggests little appetite for a fuller discussion of female offending; Reiner (2007) concurs that the media, especially tabloids, concentrate on the specific criminal event rather than broader commentary. In this vein also, it should be noted that 63 of the articles (26.9 per cent) did not have the female offender as their focus.

Table 4.2 Distribution of Articles between Newspapers

Newspaper Title	Article Distribution
Irish Times	17.9%
Evening Herald	24.4%
Irish Daily Star	35.0%
Irish Independent	26.6%

As can be seen from Table 4.2, the newspaper featuring the largest number of articles relating to female offenders was the *Irish Daily Star*. This was expected as tabloids typically report more crime-related news (Dahlgren, 1992) and more personal violent crime (Williams and Dickenson, 1993). The *Irish Times* featured the fewest number of articles relating to female offenders, also to be expected due to its nature as a broadsheet. However, the results for the *Evening Herald* and the *Irish Independent* were surprising. It was expected that the *Evening Herald* would feature more articles than the *Irish Independent*; the latter's broadsheet roots led the researcher to expect numbers more akin to the *Irish Times* yet this was not the case.

4.2.2   Headline References

References to female offenders embedded within the headlines were studied and those references which went beyond the purely descriptive were listed. There were 97 of these references. The distribution between newspapers is shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Distribution of Referential Headlines between Newspapers

Newspaper Titles	Distribution of Referential Headlines
Irish Times	8.2%
Evening Herald	25.8%
Irish Daily Star	38.1%
Irish Independent	27.8%

As expected, the *Irish Times* carried few of these headlines. The *Irish Daily Star* featured the largest number, also expected, due to the emotive nature of much tabloid reporting and their penchant for gripping headlines (Conboy, 2006). However, as previously noticed there is an unexpected result regarding the *Evening Herald* and *Irish Independent,* which shared similar numbers.

Regarding the thematic content of the headlines, it was apparent that there was a concentration on the female offender as mother. Analysis showed that 11.5 per cent of all headlines used either the words '*mother*' or '*mum*'. Another 5.1 per cent used references like '*pregnant*' or '*nurse*' indicating a maternal role. This means that 16.7 per cent of all headlines referred to the female offender as a mother, or in a care-giving capacity.

4.2.3   All Crime-related Articles

The total number of crime-related articles in the sample was 1604. There were a total of 369 articles relating to female victims of crime and as stated above there were 234 articles relating to female offenders.

Twenty-three per cent of the crime-related articles dealt with a female victim. Only 14.6 per cent of the crime-related articles dealt with a female offender. As expected from O'Connell's (1999) study, there was a preference for vulnerable victims, typified in the number of female victims of crime. Similarly, Naylor (2001) in her research of four British national dailies over a period of six months, reports that approximately half of all crime stories featured a female victim, a vast over-representation when compared to statistics.

The number of articles relating to female offenders, as a percentage of all crime-related articles (14.6 per cent) was compared to prison statistics. The total number of prison places in Ireland is 3,581 and of these only 105 are for females. This represents a meagre 2.9 per cent (all figures taken from Irish Prison Service, 2009) which suggests an over-representation of female offending in the press.

Table 4.4 Distribution of Crime-Related and Female Victim Articles

Newspaper	Total Crime-Related Articles	Total Female Victim Articles
Irish Times	332	52
Evening Herald	406	98
Irish Daily Star	556	150
Irish Independent	310	69

As shown in Table 4.4, more crime articles were found in the *Irish Daily Star*, this paper also featured the largest number of female victim of crime articles. The *Evening Herald* had the second-largest number of articles relating to crime and female victims of crime. This was expected and confirmed existing literature. The *Irish Times* had the fewest number of articles relating to female victims of crime yet more general crime articles than the *Irish Independent*. This result is unexpected. However, the difference is insignificant.

4.2.4 Categories of Crime

As can be seen from Graph 4.1 below, murder was by far the most common offence represented in the articles. This adheres to expectations relating to newsworthiness. The Irish Crime Classification System (Central Statistics Office, 2008) was used in order that legitimate categories of offence would be represented, it was hoped this would avoid any possibility that the researcher's interpretation of criminal categories could influence findings.

Categories of Crime in Articles, Graph 4.1
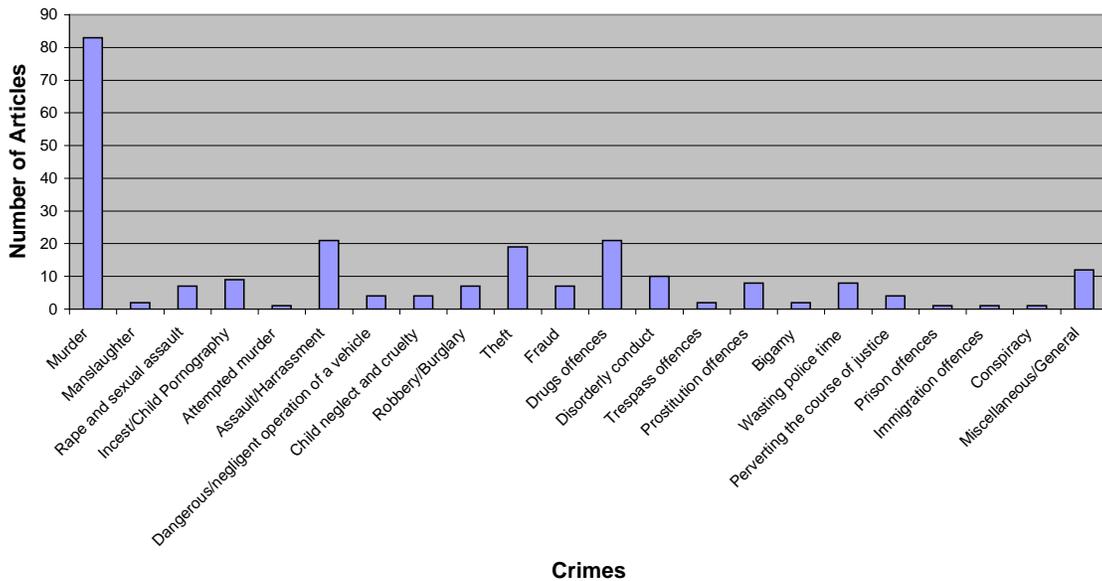
Graph 4.2 below illustrates the divergence between prison statistics and those crimes most commonly represented in the newspaper articles. The prison statistics (Irish Prison Service, 2009) show that in 2008 there were no women committed for murder, despite murder featuring prominently in the articles. There were 148 committals for theft, this is 21.0 of all committals; in the newspaper analysis only 8.1 per cent of the articles were concerned with theft; a significant under-representation. Other offences, such as road traffic violations (which comprise 29.1 per cent of all 2008 committals) are under-represented in the newspaper analysis. Drugs offence and assaults were slightly over-represented in the articles. Interestingly, there were no committals to prison in 2008 for sexual offences, but the newspaper analysis showed that 6.8 per cent of the articles dealt with offences of this nature.

Comparison of crimes represented in 2008 Prison Committals and those represented in the newspaper articles, Graph 4.2
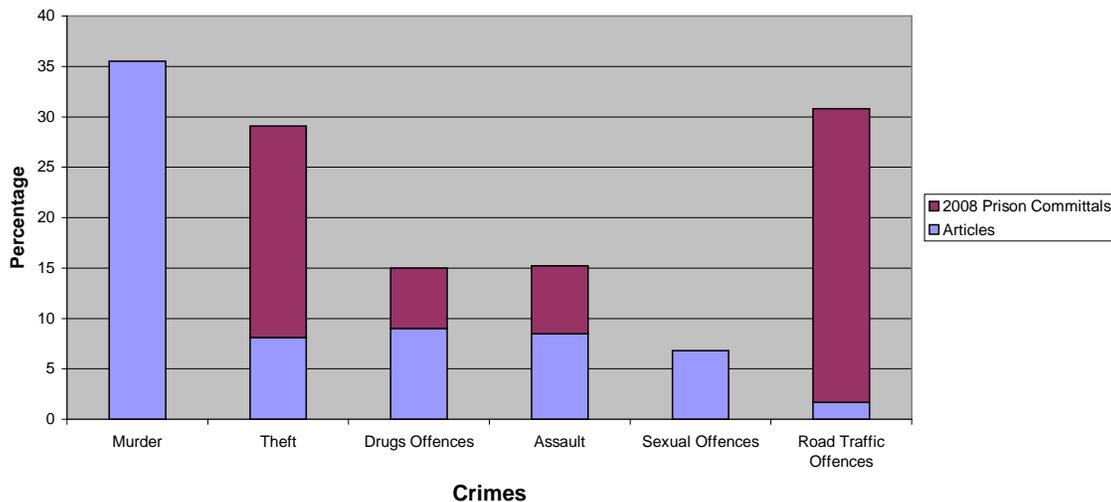
These findings support existing research which asserts that atypical crime receives more coverage (Duwe, 2000). The over-reporting of violent crimes has consistently been borne out by research (Reiner, 2007). The under-reporting of those crimes women are typically imprisoned for was a point of argument for many feminist criminologists (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004; Heidensohn, 1996).

4.2.5   Word Count

Graph 4.3 illustrates the word count of the articles; it can be seen that most articles had a word count of 200 or less.

Word Count of Articles, Graph 4.3
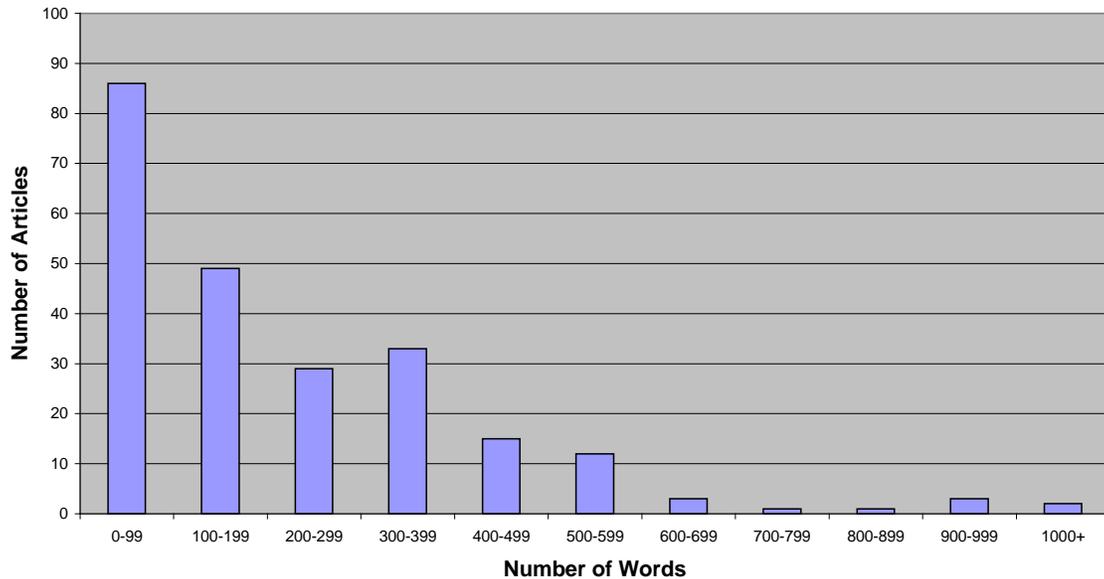
The findings suggest that little attention is paid to female offenders, beyond mere reporting. It is noteworthy that two of the largest word counts of 927 and 1177 were for a commentary piece and a review respectively. Naylor (2001) noticed a similar trend for shorter crime stories, 'one-paragraph crime reports, small pieces often collected into a side column or box' (p.183).

4.2.6   Headline Size

Seventeen of the 234 headlines were larger than 20mm. Of these, 6 related to the crime of murder. Incest accounts for 4 of the 234 articles in the sample, however it appears 3 times within the larger headlines. This suggests that sensationalist stories are more appealing. It was noteworthy that the headlines of the tabloid articles were typically larger than those of the *Irish Times*; Conboy (2006) claimed that tabloids generally have larger headlines.

4.3   Thematic Analysis

4.3.1   Motherhood

Motherhood was the primary theme which emerged. Over a third of those articles transcribed viewed the female offender through the prism of motherhood.

Two articles which report the case of a woman charged with murdering her partner both refer to the fact that the incident occurred "*a day after their son was christened*". An article appearing in the *Irish Times* refers to the judge's comments that "*the presence of Ms Sadowska's young child in Northern Ireland was a strong incentive for her to stay*". Despite her actions, her motherhood is still strongly assumed; the bonds between mother and child are offered as evidence.

The frequent reference to female offenders as mothers was noticeable, for example "*Mum accused of murdering her lover*" and "*Mother imprisoned*".

There was greater censure of female offenders who directly harmed their children. One headline was "*Knife attack mother caged*"; it documented the case of a woman accused of stabbing her daughter. The headline refers to the woman as though she were an animal.

One woman was demonised by the headline "*Psycho mum 'cut baby boy' from tragic young friend*"; her 'predatory' motherhood is contrasted with the 'stolen' motherhood of the victim.

Female offenders were also commonly represented as seeking to do the best for their children. A story covered by numerous articles was that of a woman who was charged with theft. The articles depicted her compassionately, "*Mother imprisoned despite selling home to reduce debt*"; the use of the word "*despite*" suggestive of sympathy.

There are also a number of examples of leniency being shown towards the female offender as mother. In an *Irish Independent* article, it is reported that "*his wife received a suspended three-year sentence because the judge said he didn't want both parents of their four children to be incarcerated at the same time*". This quote reveals the preference for the informal social controls of family (Allen, 1998).

Another story tells of a pregnant woman sentenced to serve the suspended portion of a sentence. However, the judge "*ordered it should only extend to when she is due to give birth in December*".

The case of Veronique Courjault, convicted of killing her newborn babies, deals squarely with motherhood. An article appearing in the *Irish Daily Star* uses informal language, for example Courjault is referred to throughout as '*mum*', although each time it is rearranged to form a different reference, "*Freezer baby mum*", "*French mum*" and "*killer mum*". These cement the idea of Courjault as mother, and create an unsympathetic tone. The suggestion that Courjault was suffering from a mental disorder is downplayed significantly in this article, "*The court rejected the argument that she had been suffering from "pregnancy denial"*". Perhaps, as Cecil (2007c) claims, the prospect of maternal filicide was too abhorrent for the newspaper to provide a compassionate account.

The *Irish Times* ran a commentary piece on this story which provides greater context. The piece portrayed Courjault in a tragic light. She is described as "*an apparently devoted wife and mother*", beset by psychological disorders. This article gives fullest airing to the defence that Courjault was suffering from "pregnancy denial". The differential reporting of this case portrays how motherhood can be subject to a variety of perspectives.

As suggested in the literature review, women who deviate from 'loving' motherhood are still something of a taboo. Crimmins et al (1997) state that children 'arouse instincts of nurturance and protectiveness on a universal level' (p.49) and they also highlight the expectation that women will assume care-giving roles. Such expectations are challenged when women kill children. Crimmins et al (1997) agree that '[w]omen who kill children are still somewhat of an enigma in the latter part of the 20th century' (p.66) and lament the 'reductionistic' thinking which states they must be either mad or bad. They argue that this ignores the fact that many of these women are victims themselves.

Cecil (2007c) found that motherhood was an angle which could be depicted differentially depending on the circumstances. Portrayals were often compassionate, as shown in a number of the articles. Similarly, Seal (2009) found that respectable motherhood could lessen moral outrage. However, these unthreatening expressions of motherhood were contrasted with the portrayal of mothers as non-maternal. If motherhood is, as Cecil

describes, 'one of the ultimate signs of femininity' (p.251) then a mother who does not exhibit such instincts must be unnatural.

Peter (2006) reflects Cecil's (2007c) view that society expects its mothers to be nurturing and cannot easily process accounts of mothers behaving otherwise. Peter claims that society seems unable to comprehend such acts, evident in its attempt 'to marginalize (or make sense of) women's violence through constructs such as mad, bad/evil, or victim" (p.299). Certainly in the contrasting reports of Veronique Courjault, it is noticeable that the *Irish Daily Star* condemns her as 'bad' while a more compassionate account portrays her as 'mad', and as a victim. In Gordon's (2008, unpublished) research, motherhood was also found to be a factor in the demonisation of her subject. There is a socially constructed understanding of how mothers are supposed to act. Cases of women harming children, especially their own, do not exist within that which is accepted as normal. Peter claims that 'a man is construed as bad or evil because he violated a criminal act; however, a woman is labeled bad or evil or explained as mad or victim because she violated the social constructions of gender' (p.284). Naylor (2001) similarly documented such double standards in existence for fathers whose misdeeds towards children were accepted because of a normalised attitude towards masculinity. Even within academic writing, the category of 'victim' which Peter presents as an ill-formed attempt to understand such women, emerges as a common theme (evident in Crimmins et al, 1997). It seems there are few ways to discuss such offending behaviour without reference to madness, badness or victimhood.

Research conducted with women prisoners would certainly suggest that motherhood is a real and pressing concern. Cecil (2007a) believes that a true representation of women prisoners in their roles as mothers could illuminate the humanity of these women, so often lacking in media representations.

4.3.2   Ideal Womanhood

As outlined in the literature review, the concept of ideal womanhood featured strongly in reports of female offenders; this was also apparent in the articles.

There were many allusions to the female offenders' good nature, typically made by defence counsel, "*… involved with her church, and is determined to get off methadone*". In the case of a woman charged with making a false statement, her barrister claims his client has been ""*burning the candle at both ends" through work and outside interests such as … charity work*".

Compassion was afforded to women who offended to provide for their children. An article in the *Evening Herald* twice mentions that a woman was "*raising her children alone after her husband left her for another woman*" and runs the emotive headline "*Mum stole €16 of clothes for her kids*". The headline highlights the insignificance of the sum. By expressly saying that the clothes were for her children, much ambiguity of judgment is removed and the woman is portrayed as heroically capable of self-sacrifice.

There are other cases which conversely show how female offenders faced criticism if they deviated from expected behaviour. In one case, the judge commented that the woman was "*a very predatory female … a woman exploiting a man*".

The reporting of Amanda Knox's testimony was an example of incredible censure being heaped upon a female offender for the alleged inappropriateness of her actions. The literature review illustrated that women have frequently come under suspicion because of their composure. A lack of tears seems to imply the presence of guilt. One article reports how Knox "*giggled in the witness box*", a contrast to those articles which reports the female offender who "*broke down in tears*" or "*wept outside the courtroom*". An *Evening Herald* sub-heading reads, "*Witness box: confident American accused of murder coolly tells her side of the story – in rapid-fire Italian*". Knox's composure is an indicator of her guilt. As outlined in the literature review, Knox is not the only woman to be criticised by the press for the perceived inappropriateness of her behaviour.

Women who commit crimes transgress the tolerance thresholds. There are certain characteristics which are viewed favourably as feminine, and conversely there are certain traits which are portrayed unfavourably. Charitable work, church involvement, and maternal instinct, are all capable of mitigating moral culpability. However, composure and inappropriate joviality can be represented as damning indictments.

Lambert (2008), dissected the media reaction to a woman imprisoned for drug trafficking; he argued that images of the woman weeping during her trial served to reinforce

perceptions that she was innocent. 'It seemed the more she was shown to be crying, the more palpable and transparently obvious her innocence became' (p.242). 'The weeping woman' is a powerful symbol, 'a figure of redemption in the Christian Bible' (p.242) and as such has strong resonance. As Cavaglion (2008) found, the perceived ambivalence of a female offender is often seized upon by the media and the public as indicative of guilt. This was the case with Rosemary West, as suggested by Berrington and Honkatukia (2002) who write that she was 'effectively on trial for 'lack of womanhood'' (p.51).

4.3.3   Alcohol and Drugs

Alcohol was mentioned in a significant number of articles, either as a direct cause of the offence or as a contributing factor.

One story related to a woman who claimed, *"[w]hen I have a lot of drinks, something inside me snaps"*. This was widely reported in the retelling of the story, suggesting that the woman's inebriation had been a factor in the commission of the offence.

Another article reports that a young woman admitted to being "*out of her mind*" drunk, the headline proclaiming *"Drunk woman insulted garda"*.

In an article detailing a race meeting in England the final paragraph reports that *"…one woman was ejected from the races by three police officers for being drunk and disorderly"*.

The above cases demonstrate the contributing factor of alcohol, however there were other, more serious cases where this was also alleged or suggested.

One female offender, charged with murder, was reported to have been "*drinking heavily*" when an argument between her and the victim began. Once again, the suggestion is that alcohol was an influential factor in the subsequent offence.

Yet another article also reports the influence of alcohol on the female offender's actions. A woman, charged with assault was found to have been drinking with the victim before the offence; the judge remarked at sentencing, *"…you drink far too much, far too often"*.

There are various other articles which cite alcohol as a factor responsible for the disorganisation of the female offender's life. A general article cites alcohol- and drug-related deaths as one of the most common causes of death for former women prisoners.

One woman, faced with allegations of incest and sexual abuse, was reported to have had "*documented difficulties with alcohol abuse*". Another article reported the "*drinking bender*" of one woman who received bad news relating to her health.

The above demonstrates the prominence of alcohol within the articles and highlights this as a potential contributing factor to offences directly, or indirectly through the impact alcoholism can have on one's life.

The issue of drugs also emerged from the analysis and was cited as a contributing factor in many of the offences. The drug addiction of the female offender was portrayed as contributing to the offence in a number of articles. One woman, referred to as a "*Junkie mum*" reported her drug addiction as a contributing factor.

Another case reported the behaviour of a woman "*who has battled a heroin addiction*" who offended after receiving bad news relating to her health, complications which had arisen from her addiction.

Another female offender was ordered to serve the suspended portion of her sentence *"for failing to stay off drugs"*.

In cases where drugs were not related to the offence, admission of drug-taking was used to portray the female offender in a negative light. The case of Amanda Knox is an example of a story in which her drug-taking appeared to be a weapon in her character assassination. Admissions from Knox that she had smoked marijuana "*every once in a while*" were featured prominently in the articles and were included in headlines.

The world of drug dealing and criminal gangs is also related to several of the articles, with one article reporting the close links between drug trafficking and prostitution. Another article reports the case of a woman arrested on suspicion of murder and links the crime to *"[a] battle for control of the lucrative drugs trade in the city"*. Problems relating to drug addiction, as well as the structure of the business and everything this entails, are factors which appear to contribute to the commission of offences as represented in the articles.

The issue of alcohol and drug misuse is not a fiction of newspaper reporting. The facts sing of the correlation between female offenders and addiction; female offenders are documented as more likely than male offenders to have addiction problems (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004). It remains the case that 'the proportion of offenders known to the

criminal justice system who have some form of alcohol or illicit drug problem is significantly high' (South, 2007: 826). South considered alcohol use patterns and concluded that instrumental changes have transformed consumption trends, notably 'the rise in social acceptability of female drinking' (p.811). South suggests that addiction among women is under-represented due to fears that their children will be placed in care if they are exposed as addicts. This illustrates how an already destructive problem can be compounded for women.

Scraton and Moore (2005) have documented the specific hardships faced by women prisoners. Their research, carried out in Northern Ireland, is replete with references to drugs and alcohol. The twin evils of alcohol and drugs are writ large within their individual accounts of women. Scraton and Moore appeal convincingly that women prisoners' specific vulnerability should be addressed, that those issues which reoccur with depressing regularity in their accounts ought to be tackled.

The links between alcohol, drugs and offending have been the subject of much research. A relationship has been found between serious drug use and robbery and assault (Sommers and Baskin, 1993), between chronic drug use and violent offences generally (McCoy et al, 2001), and between alcohol use and intimate partner violence (Ansara and Hindin, 2009). Ansara and Hindin (2009) unearthed specific gendered patterns regarding intimate partner violence (IPV). In their Filipino study of husband and wife couples they found that wife-only perpetrations of IPV were significantly related to the wife's alcohol use. They report that 'alcohol use by the wife [was] associated with a higher risk of perpetration' (p.1587); while it is acknowledged that generalisations cannot be taken from such findings considering the different cultures of the Philippines and Ireland, the findings are nevertheless incredibly interesting and further suggestive of the link between female offending and alcohol use.

Van der Laan et al (2009) concluded that '[o]ffending may … be facilitated by … using alcohol or drugs' (420). Van der Laan et al found the situational additions of alcohol or drugs were immediate precipitators of offending, many of the articles outlined above suggest similar occurrences.

As suggested above, the causal pathways between alcohol and drug misuse and offending are complex; the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2003, cited

in South, 2007: 829) has outlined the various pathways between drug use and crime. There are those crimes committed by virtue of the illegal nature of the drugs themselves; there are crimes committed while under the influence of drugs; acquisitive crimes which support the drug habit; and crimes related to the drugs market. These categories are represented in the sample of articles.

Maher (1997, cited in Miller and Mullins, 2008: 240) has researched the area of women and the drugs markets; she is critical of the representation of female drug addicts, which she contends is highly sexualised and ultimately harmful. Women are represented as desperate, as 'strung-out' and willing to do anything for a 'fix'. The depressing reality of Maher's fears is borne out within some of the articles, in which the female offenders are variously referred to as "*Desperate mum*", and reported to be "*so desperate for business she was caught having sex with a man in exchange for a box of crisps*". The inevitable overlap of the drugs trade and the sex industry is noticeable, with frequent representation of women as desperate.

4.3.4   Ethnicity and Nationality

During the course of the thematic analysis, the issue of ethnicity emerged prominently. Nineteen articles dealt with offences committed in Ireland by women of ethnic minorities, 8.1 per cent of the total number of articles.

Of the articles which featured female offenders from ethnic minorities committing crime in Ireland, half were found in the *Irish Daily Star*. Two-thirds of the articles of this nature in the *Irish Daily Star* concerned Romanian offenders, cases of a "*teenage Romanian who trespassed…*" and a *"Romanian girl has been bound over to keep the peace…"* are examples.

Another noticeable trend was the tendency for these articles to report a relatively minor offence: theft, trespass and failure to produce identification documents were the only offences mentioned in these articles. By contrast, those offences committed by other ethnic minority groups were more serious, including murder and drug trafficking.

It would appear that Romanian female offenders are more likely to feature in articles than female offenders of other ethnic groups, and furthermore they are more likely to feature

for minor offences. This suggests an over-reporting of the crimes of Romanian females. This is especially prevalent in the *Irish Daily Star*.

The issue of ethnicity arose again in relation to the case of Samantha Orobator, a story which was covered by seven of the articles within the sample. Orobator's mother, Jane, becomes an angle for many of the articles and in every article the mother is linked to Trinity College in Dublin. Each article that makes this connection refers to her as a student, with the exception of an article in the *Irish Daily Star* which instead claims that she "*works at Trinity College*". This discrepancy is unusual. However, this is not the only interesting element of the *Irish Daily Star* reporting; the female offender is referred to as "*Nigerian-born*", while her mother is referred to as an "*Irish citizen*", a nuance of language not seen in the other newspapers. These subtle differences suggest to the researcher a pre-occupation with nationality, suggesting that while the mother and daughter may *now* be Irish and British respectively, they were not always so. The reporting implies to the reader the importance of ethnicity and nationality.

Lambert (2008) discusses the case of Schapelle Corby, a young Australian woman imprisoned in Indonesia for drug trafficking. This case has many similarities with the case of Samantha Orobator. He relates how the Australian media fixate on trivial personal details including 'a doomed sexual relationship with another inmate and a negative pregnancy test' (p.237). Corby's imprisonment led to widespread mobilisation of support for her and a 'Boycott Bali' campaign. For further comparison, the reporting of an Irish girl jailed for possession of cocaine in Spain was examined, a *" young Irish woman has been locked up in a Spanish prison for three years – for possessing cocaine worth just €50"*.

Throughout the article, the writing suggests the imprisonment was unwarranted. The article expresses sympathy for the female offender, referring to her as *"[p]retty Sarah"* and quoting a friend who states that she *"is not a drug user"*. The nature of the reporting suggests nationalism typical of British tabloids. Conboy (2006) claims that the tabloids harbour strong nationalist sentiments. He cites as a motivation for this, the globalised culture in which they compete, in which they stress nationalism, thereby appealing to readers adrift in an unfamiliar world. 'The tabloids police the borders of national identity' (Conboy, 2006: 9).

There was a similar, if larger-scale, reaction to the imprisonment of Schapelle Corby (Lambert, 2008). 'The question at the centre of this saga and anchoring the Corby image has always been, 'What if this happened to your daughter?'' (p.240). Lambert asserts '… the body of the white female persists as the unit of exchange in an aggressive adherence to historical tropes of nationalism' (p.241). The 'innocence' of the subject is crucial. Perhaps this explains the differential reporting between Sarah Egan and Samantha Orobator. Only when the subject is innocent can morally justified outrage be expressed. Emotionality is an indicator is this innocence. For example, Lambert (2008) contrasts the emotion necessary to prove one's innocence with the composure of Lindy Chamberlain. Perhaps some of the differential reporting on Orobator and Egan arises from the unwillingness of the public to accept that Orobator is the "*fragile little thing*" her mother claims her to be; her successful avoidance of a death penalty may render her more equipped with agency than Egan. Lambert repeatedly makes reference to Corby's 'whiteness'; does Orobator's 'blackness' mean she is less likely to become the symbol of a rallying call against a 'resurgence of orientalist otherness' (p.244).

As highlighted in the literature review, ethnicity and nationality are factors which result in differential reporting of female offenders.

Humphries (1998) exposed this in relation to news reporting of 'Crack Mothers'; reports were less likely to be sympathetic if their subject was black.

Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) document the proliferation of stories about black girls joining gangs. Once again, white girls were portrayed in a less sensational manner while girls of colour were shown as violent and dangerous.

Cavaglion (2008) also demonstrated this differential reporting; women of ethnic minorities were treated differently in the press because of the deployment of a narrative familiar to the newspapers' readership that Arabs are more criminal than Israelis. It brings to mind that which Hall et al (1978) described as 'maps of meaning' which render a story more accessible by inflecting it with society's consensus on an issue.

The representation of Romanian female offenders in the *Irish Daily Star* suggests a process of 'othering' whereby our own identity is reinforced through contrast with 'an Other' (Said, 2003).

Issues of ethnicity and nationality have also become instrumental in recent attempts to construct a viable feminist criminology; "the intersections of race, class, gender and age" are crucial (Miller and Mullins, 2008: 217). Burgess-Proctor (2006) highlights the importance of intersections to feminist criminologists. She suggests the future of feminist criminology is the exploration of crime, gender, and inequality, expressed by exploration of class, nationality and other pertinent factors. In their exploration of life at the intersections, Chesney-Lind and Pasko (2004) identify sinister interplays of race, class and gender. They view the current preoccupation with African American and Hispanic teenagers' gang involvement as another wave of 'backlash' journalism, yet another manifestation of an 'emancipation' hypothesis.

4.3.5   Sexuality and Physical Appearance

The theme of sexuality emerged from the analysis, however, the use of sexualised imagery was not directed towards a universal end, and there were various roles it seemed to occupy.

Descriptions of what female offenders wore were common, for example "*Ms Brennan appeared in court wearing a white blouse and black trousers, with her hair held up at the back*".

Another story focused on a woman accused of attempting to change her appearance in order to escape conviction, articles referred to the fact that the woman had been "*receiving botox injections for 12 years and regularly attended Dublin's exclusive Blackrock Clinic*". It appears that this story was made more attractive by virtue of the cosmetic surgery element.

Sexuality was also portrayed negatively as potentially dangerous. One article referred to a female offender as "*Lesbian ex-nun*" and reported previous allegations of abuse against the woman. The references to the woman as "*lesbian*" appear to have negative connotations. The woman's sexuality is offered as an indicator of her immorality. Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) assert that the demonisation of lesbians is tangled up with the representation of female offenders as masculine.

There were also articles which employed sexuality as a comedic tool, such as the article headlined "*Prostitute has sex for box of crisps*". Another article related to a young woman arrested for abusive behaviour towards a garda, the article was given substantial space, despite detailing a minor infraction of the law. It is suggested that this story became more newsworthy because of the remarks made by the woman, such as her reference to the garda as a "*little slag*".

A story reporting a woman accused of bigamy was given substantial coverage. It would appear that the woman's former profession played a part in the popularity of this story, it was mentioned throughout the articles that she had "*worked as an escort and appeared in adult movies*".

A prurient interest in the sex lives of female offenders appeared to be a very prevalent and insidious feature of the articles. It was common for violent and other serious crimes to be reported from an angle which most exploited the sexual element of the crime; this is similar to that found by Wykes (2001) who believed sex and violence were inseparable in contemporary culture. There were three stories, covered prolifically, which demonstrate this assertion, the cases of Cecile Brossard, Samantha Orobator and Amanda Knox.

The case of Cecile Brossard was very popular. Articles covering the trial seemed to revel in the sexual elements, an example of some of the references to Brossard include "*S&M mistress*", "*dominatrix*" and "*modern-day courtesan*". The case was viewed through the sexual habits of the offender and victim. One fact which received a disproportionate amount of attention was that the victim was found wearing a "*full-body latex suit*". The *Irish Daily Star* featured just two short articles on this story, yet in only 122 words, five sexual references were found. This is indicative of how all the newspapers reported the story.

In the case of Samantha Orobator, media attention focused on her when it emerged she had become pregnant while in prison. Articles fixated on the logistics of how she had managed to become pregnant and the articles became increasingly lurid as the mystery of the "*sperm donor*" and "*sperm-filled syringe*" escalated.

The case of Amanda Knox demonstrates a highly salacious reporting style. The sexual elements of the story are emphasised in headlines. Both the *Evening Herald* and the *Irish Daily Star* refer to her as "*Foxy Knoxy*", with only the *Evening Herald* reporting Knox's

claims that the nickname was picked up "*from crouching on defence on the soccer fields*". The most extreme headline among the articles appeared in the *Irish Daily Star*, "*Foxy Knoxy: sex, drugs & my 7 lovers*". An *Evening Herald* article reports, "*Knox grinned sheepishly when describing a mark on her neck as "a hickey, from Raffaele"*"; this reporting was typical.

The sexualisation of women prisoners has been a recurrent feature of the literature (Lambert, 2008; Cecil, 2007a). A concern for intimate personal details and reproductive intrigues is noticeable within the articles. The similarity between the Orobator case and that of Schapelle Corby is striking, as Lambert reports of Corby '[h]er body … became both a potential passport to freedom and a biological, ethnic and sexual prison' (p.249). Fascination with Corby's reproductive organs abounded when it emerged that the Indonesian authorities had requested she take a pregnancy test after rumours of a relationship with a fellow prisoner. These cases speak of a deep-seated interest in the sexuality and sexual functions of female prisoners. It seems that the sexualisation of female prisoners is a well-documented phenomenon (Chesney-Lind and Eliason, 2006; Mason, 2006).

Gordon (2008, unpublished) also reported prominent references to the sexuality and physical appearance of her subject. She comments on the interest in the woman's 'alleged sexual history, her affair with her co-accused and also allegations stating that she had an affair with a prison officer' (p.6). Gordon's findings are particularly relevant to the current research, as they were conducted in Northern Ireland and included Irish newspapers. The articles in the current study exhibit the same tendencies towards the sexualisation of female offenders and disproportionate interest in their personal lives.

Conboy (2006) noted this trend for the sexually exploitative reporting of women in his study of the tabloids. He cites the intentions of the early tabloid editors that stories should appeal to female readers by inclusion of personal details. Similarly he notes the relative absence of women from the pages of newspapers unless related to 'lifestyle' sections (Tuchman, 1981). Both of these trends would seem to predict the findings of the current research, that female offenders were situated predominantly in a discourse of sexuality.

4.3.6   Psychological Issues

There were a number of articles which referred to the female offender's mental state. Out of the entire sample of 234 articles, 26 were found to mention the female offender's mental state explicitly or allude to such; this represents 11.1 per cent of all articles.

Three of the articles mentioned suicide, for example "*Korena Roberts … is on suicide watch as investigators in the US decide whether to charge her with the baby's death as well*".

The articles also mention various mental illnesses, such as depression, bi-polar disorder and manic-depression, and schizophrenia. In four articles it is reported that the female offender was judged to have diminished responsibility; in the case of a Chinese waitress accused of murder the judge ruled "*she had limited criminal responsibility because she was manic-depressive*".

From careful examination of those articles which make reference to psychological issues, it was evident that the degree to which the reporter accepted the psychological issue to be valid influenced the representation of the female offender. There are two vastly different articles reporting the case of a woman charged with killing her newborn babies which show both ends of the spectrum. In the first article in the *Irish Daily Star* the woman is referred to as "*the killer mum*" and the claims that the woman suffered from a psychological condition were dismissed with the line "*The court rejected the argument that she had been suffering from pregnancy denial*". However, in the other article which appeared in the *Irish Times*, the nature of pregnancy denial is expounded, statistics are offered, the woman is described as having a face "*streaked with tears*" and her case is represented as a tragedy "*[t]he strongest clue to Courjault's damaged psyche came early in the trial…*".

One article detailing the case of a woman accused of murdering her partner refers to "*a contraceptive device fitted into her arm a month before the murder which … can cause heightened levels of aggression through the release of hormones*".

Another story concerned a woman who explains her offence by reference to a traumatic scene she witnessed; the woman remarked that she had "*not been mentally right since*".

Through the revelation of a mental disorder, the offender can usurp the victim's status. The case of Cecile Brossard demonstrates the widespread sympathy for "*the uneducated woman who was described by expert witnesses as mentally fragile*". Similarly, in the case of a woman suspected of murder, the focus quickly shifts to her own mental state as it is reported that she "*was undergoing psychiatric treatment in hospital*".

Regarding Brossard, two distinct strands of reporting were noticeable. The choice presented at trial was between a woman driven to committing a "*crime of passion*", and of a woman who exploited her victim for mercenary ends. These choices are highly restrictive, two of the acceptable explanations for female offending, that of sexual passion/love as an excuse or of the devious manipulator (Naylor, 1995). The second strand noticeable was the suggestion of deep psychological issues suffered by Brossard, yet this falls into another of Naylor's categories, that of the madwoman. The potential of mental illness is most fully explored in the commentary piece featured in the *Irish Times*. The claim that Brossard was victimised in her early life, compounded by the claim that the victim was often cruel towards her, recalls the 'blurred boundaries' between victimisation and offending. Victimisation is a contentious issue when considered in terms of agency.

It would be an injustice to female offenders if any psychological issues they presented with were not taken into consideration. However, the issue of agency also arises in any such discussion; by portraying many female offenders as mentally disordered, do we lessen their agency and render them powerless? Agency is a matter of great concern to feminist criminologists. They are critical of attempts to pathologise female offenders (Morrissey, 2003; Allen, 1998; Smart, 1976) because this must inevitably weaken women by reinforcing the stereotype that women are irrational. However, the reality remains that females frequently report a 'significantly higher likelihood of mental health problems' (Belknap and Holsinger, 2006: 60).

Allen (1998) claims that feminist discourse cannot escape such conceptions of women as victims. She argues that criminal justice personnel, medical professionals *and* feminist criminologists must view female offenders as capable of being 'conscious, intentional, responsible, and potentially dangerous and culpable subjects of the law' (p.66). It would

certainly appear, from the articles, that considerations of mental illness have served in numerous cases to reduce the female offender's culpability.

> *The madness discourse sees violent women at the mercy of their hormones or their biology ... Sometimes they are also regarded as victims of a tragedy or trauma which has changed their character* (Berrington and Honkatukia, 2002: 53)

It can be seen from those articles referred to earlier in the section, that the 'hormonal' or 'trauma-related' explanation is much in evidence. Such narratives are commonplace in discussions of female offending; Naylor's (2001) research, similar in nature to that which comprises the current research, found 'strong themes of either mental illness or of the woman's acting under overwhelming stress, both narratives operating to reduce responsibility and censure' (p.188).

4.3.7   Other Issues

The 'celebrity' of many female offenders was evident in the articles. While the commission of an offence by a celebrity creates a newsworthy story for newspapers it is also the case that celebrity can often attach to previously unknown female offenders. The prominence of true crime literature, blending suspense and characterisation with fact, sees women portrayed in such roles as the femme fatale, for example; larger-than-life personalities and celebrity are recurrent features of newspapers (Berrington and Honkatukia, 2002).

The reliance on official sources was another notable feature. Reporters rely on such sources as they are infrequently present to witness the event themselves (Davies, 2009; Gordon, 2008 unpublished; Chibnall, 1981).

4.4   Conclusion

The syntactical analysis appeared to suggest a lack of interest in female offenders; cases were newsworthy when they conformed to sensationalist news values hence an over-representation of atypical crimes. A thematic analysis suggested that even within the few crimes reported in newspapers, only certain elements arouse interest. Female offenders were viewed through the traditional hallmarks of femininity, notably motherhood and sexuality. The issue of mental health also featured prominently, arguably also an accepted hallmark of femininity (Appignanesi, 2008). These three roles – mother, sexual, mad – greatly restrict how female offenders are portrayed. Interestingly, the prominence of alcohol- and drug-related issues would appear to be reflective of the reality of much offending.

5.   Conclusions and Recommendations

The research suggests that there are limited available roles for women. As highlighted in the literature review, women are often presented in simplistic terms pre-ordained by society; it can be seen that the representation of female offenders in Irish newspapers shares many of these limitations. Women are neutralised by sexualisation, motherhood and pathology. Women are made two-dimensional (Butcher, 1981) and through such reductionism they are trivialised. If a woman is exclusively a sex object, she is entirely viewed through her appeal to others. If a woman is exclusively a mother, she is entirely the care-giver of others and the symbol of a societal ideal. If a woman is exclusively 'mad', she can be made invisible. Women's agency is problematic in such representations, they cannot seize ownership of their own deeds and a new paradigm is required (Morrissey, 2003).

If, as social constructionism states, meaning is socially constructed (Hall et al, 1978), then the representation of female offenders in newspapers is a building block of how society defines female offenders. The *representation* of crime has been elevated to a position of recognised importance (Ferrell, 2006). In light of this, the current research seems particularly troublesome. Female offenders in Irish newspapers occupy only a small selection of roles and their representation is closely tied to concepts of femininity. Motherhood was the lens through which many of these women were viewed and judged. Similarly, interest in the sexuality of female offenders served to trivialise them and the frequent pathologising of the female offenders reinforced the biological determinism criticised by Smart (1976).

It should be stated that there were differential reporting styles between newspapers. The *Irish Times* was less likely to consign female offenders to superficially constructed roles. Its writing style was more measured, more likely to provide depth, and more likely to attempt a three-dimensional portrait of female offenders. The features of the tabloid, however, were markedly different, and conformed to expectations (Conboy, 2006). The *Irish Daily Star* was striking in its informal use of language, sexualisation of female offenders and triviality. While Davies (2009) comments that '[n]obody needs a book to tell them that the tabloids are an unreliable source of information about the world' (p.4)

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this is perhaps not so evident to the thousands of tabloid readers who regularly receive their news from such publications (Noonan, 2009).

In light of the recognised importance of representation in any understanding of crime, it is argued that reductionistic representations of female offenders can have negative repercussions for the public awareness of, and opinion towards, this group. Reporting which accurately depicted the realities for female offenders would be beneficial to female offenders *and* news consumers.

The research findings suggested further avenues of study. The predominance of official sources was notable, further research could illuminate the relationship between official sources, newspaper representation and public opinion; Allen's (1998) work has proved this is a pertinent area of study. The pervasive presence of celebrity in contemporary culture also emerged. Conboy (2006) has highlighted how the semantics of celebrity are frequently employed to depict offenders; an investigation of how the media, buoyed up by true crime literature, manufacture infamy to create celebrity female offenders could further illustrate the reductionistic representation of women.

The representation of female offenders in Irish newspapers adheres closely to common stereotypical narratives surrounding femininity. The press is an influential institution; it must therefore engage in accurate representation.

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APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In order to accurately record information the following shall be noted for each article in an initial tally sheet which will provide grounding for later analysis:

- The unique identification number of each article shall be recorded, this shall be arrived at through the use of the system outlined in the methodology chapter;
- The page number of each article shall be recoded for the researcher's easy reference;
- The date of each article shall be included, once again for the researcher's easy reference, as unique identification numbers will not correspond directly with dates in the sample month as Sunday newspapers were not included;
- Headline wording shall be recorded, this will be used in a later referential analysis of headlines;
- Headline size shall be recorded as this will aid in establishing which stories received more attention and merited more notice. Only the headlines, and not sub-headings, shall be recorded in this manner, headline size will be recorded in millimetre;
- Word count will be tallied and recorded. Word count shall include the body of the article, headlines and captions accompanying images. It shall not include that which is expressed in numeric figures such as €1,000 or 25mph. Nor does it include the correspondent's name, or the news agency if included. Hyphenated words are counted as one, for example 'Dublin-based' would be counted as one word;
- Format shall be included in the initial tally information. This will record whether an article is straight reporting, editorial, commentary, review and so on;
- Where or not the female offender was the focus of the article will be recorded, this will enable the researcher to see beyond the final figure regarding the number of articles dealing with female offenders. The count could prove to be misleading, as there may be many articles which mention a female offender but offer no other information on this matter;
- Whether articles are accompanied by images of female offenders will be recorded, the prevalence of images may suggest a particular interest;
- The category of the offence shall be recorded, this will provide important information about the nature of offence considered most newsworthy;
- Whether or not the article is to be transcribed for thematic analysis shall be recorded, these articles will be those which contain more information on a female offender and are therefore more likely to unearth themes. Many articles reference female offenders in a sentence, despite the focus lying elsewhere.

Once this initial tally sheet has been completed, those articles in which the female offender is a dominant feature will be transcribed.

It should be mentioned, that the initial week of newspapers (Monday 1st June until Saturday 6th June) served as a pilot period. The researcher refined categories and procedures over this period, and then began the process anew with detailed directions. The researcher achieved great familiarity with the articles by reading through them numerous times. On an initial read-through, articles relating to female offenders were flagged for later attention. These articles were then read again and word counts recorded. Finally, an excel spreadsheet was used to record the initial tally information, and those articles selected for detailed thematic analysis were transcribed. In this manner the researcher began to see themes emerging.

Stories will only be included where crime is the distinguishing feature of the article. For example, there were articles detailing the conviction and imprisonment of two US journalists in North Korea. However, these were deemed irrelevant because this matter aligns itself more closely to politics and international relations than to crime. Similarly, there were various articles relating to the alleged sexual indiscretions of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi; these are not included because they represent a political crisis and the issue of female offenders in the guise of prostitutes is a peripheral issue.
Articles will be included where they make direct reference to female offenders. A number of articles dealing with the conscription of young girls into criminal gangs have been excluded because they fall beyond the scope of criminal responsibility due to their young age.
There was a proliferation of articles relating to the Ryan Report, which published findings of abuse in religious-run institutions; these will not be included within the scope of the research as 'crime' articles, due to the unclear liability. One article has been included, which referred explicitly to former charges against a nun.
Two articles relating to the release of Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma have not been included, due to her status as a political prisoner and the researcher's opinion that this once again refers more to international relations and politics than to crime.
Stories of drug-taking shall not be included, unless some specific mention of a crime is also mentioned.
Similarly, articles relating to sex trafficking and prostitution shall not be included unless they make specific mention of the crime of prostitution. Many of the articles relating to these subjects dealt with women as victims or the attempts of legislators to criminalise the act of paying for sex, these were deemed beyond the scope of the current research.
Two articles detailing how actress Anna Friel prepared for the role of playing a prostitute have not been included, also because these do not refer to specific criminal wrongdoing.
The measurement of the total number of articles relating to crime will include within its scope crimes related to Irish terrorism. However, not included within this category are articles relating to international terrorism, for example terrorist bombings in Spain. Also not included are articles reporting on civil strife in countries, despite violence maybe coming within this ambit. This distinction is used because international terrorism and civil conflict are considered to be issues beyond the narrower ambit of 'crime' for the purposes of the current study.