

CHAPTER ONE

Change and Continuity

“...popular culture, particularly in film and TV texts, have either colluded with or provided a challenge to dominant versions of masculinity.”¹⁰

Historically, the police and crime genre has been enculturated as “one of the most masculine television genres”¹¹ due to the dominance of masculinity on the small screen. Over the past few decades, the rising popularity of crime shows has led to the perpetuation of narrow gender identities in which males are viewed as dominant and females as subordinate. Crime shows have maintained a culture of polarising masculinity and femininity through strong characterisations of the male detective as leader and action man, while female detectives are relegated to feminine roles of comforting the distressed and the victims. However, recent developments in crime shows have seen an increase of dominant female detectives, challenging the societal norms of what femininity should be. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to examine aspects of continuity and change in relation to the portrayal of male and female detectives in crime shows and how these portrayals have “challenge[d] the norms of male (and female) behaviour”¹² overtime.

Crime shows originated in the 1950’s when television began to become mainstream in homes in Britain and America and reflected the patriarchal values in society at that time. Television reinforced the socialised view that men dominated the public sphere, while women were relegated to the micro world and hence not needed when solving public crime and disorder. Women in the 1950s were also disassociated from the crime world, as their domestic identity meant that crime was exclusively committed and solved by men. In early crime shows male characters dominated screen time, with female detectives experiencing a “lack of ...

¹⁰ Martin King and Ian Cummins (2015). *The Criminal Entrepreneur in David Peace’s Red Riding*. Available: <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=f03HCQAAQBAJ&pg=PA159&lpg=PA159&dq=hedonistic+masculinity+in+crime+tv&source=bl&ots=kun3tgQRb5&sig=r1iove8dI3TWMKS8ef9NJZKe4s&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAGoVChMIgriXj67NyAIVihSUCh0aegJk#v=onepage&q=hedonistic%20masculinity%20in%20crime%20tv&f=false>

¹¹ Rebecca Feasey . (2008). 8.Policing and Crime Drama: Investigating Male Authority. In: Antony Rowe *Masculinity and Popular Television* . Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press Ltd . 80.

¹² Lindsay Bernhagen. (2010). *Masculinity on Popular TV*. Available: <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/217/177>.

representation”¹³. This is demonstrated through the 1951 crime show *Dragnet*, the first television crime drama to be seen on television screens worldwide. The show featured a predominately male cast, with the men being both the crime stoppers and crime perpetrators and women adopting the role of ‘damsel in distress’ or being absent all together. This was supported by my content analysis¹⁴, as the male detectives portrayed the characteristic of both physical and emotional strength 44 times, a masculine characteristic best associated with being a dominant and powerful detective. Through this analysis of *Dragnet*, it also showed the lack of female representation in the police force, but instead portraying them as the victims, with women being the victim of a crime 6 more times than the male characters. It is important to note, however, that the data obtained may have contained bias as coding was based on my own personal interpretation. Although the “1950s saw a doubling of the number of women in law enforcement in the United States... the overall number of women making up law enforcement officers remained relatively low”¹⁵, with women making up less than 8%¹⁶ of the police force. This heavily reflects the context of the time as women during the 1950’s and 1960’s were relegated to the domestic microsphere, due to women being enculturated as the ‘weaker sex’ and therefore not being represented in high positions of power and authority, such as the police/detective force. Through this, it is evident that the media as a tool of socialisation highly reflected the societal norms of the 1950s as it perpetuated the stereotypical view of males as the “strong heroes”¹⁷ and females as weak and “more fearful to crime”¹⁸.

This view of gender continued into the 1970’s as masculinity and femininity were clearly contrasted as a result of the introduction of female detectives alongside male detectives in crime shows. The dramatic social changes of this period, such as the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, were reflected in the institution of the police force as the 1972 Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in American meant that “police departments were

¹³ Annie Manion . (2015). *Between Victimhood and Power: The Female Detectives of Television’s Crime Dramas* . Available: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/between-victimhood-and-power-watching-the-female-detectives-of-television-crime-dramas>.

¹⁴ Content Analysis – Appendix C

¹⁵ (2013) *History of Women in Policing*. Available: <http://womenandpolicing.com/history/historytext.htm>.

¹⁶ Michael F Aiello . (2013). *Policing the masculine frontier: Cultural criminological analysis of the gendered performance of policing*. Available: <http://cmc.sagepub.com/content/10/1/59.full>.

¹⁷ Louisa Mellor. (2014). *The women taking over TV crime drama*. Available: <http://www.denofgeek.com/tv/happy-valley/30795/the-women-taking-over-tv-crime-drama>.

¹⁸ Professor E. Fattah . (1995). *Victimisation and Fear of Crime among the Elderly: A possible link?* . Available: http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/conferences/olderpeople/fattah.pdf.

prohibited by law from discriminating against women in hiring”¹⁹. This in turn sparked a movement in the media to increase the representation of women in crime shows, as the media “reflects opinion and... changes in society”²⁰. Although, whilst the 1970’s saw a rise in the appearance of female detectives in shows such as *Hart to Hart* and *Get Smart*, the masculine traits of the male detectives continued to confine women to a secondary role, giving them less power and authority than male detectives. Female detectives were portrayed as the “guardian stickler [who] solves the case and arrests the criminals... but always in a secondary role”²¹ to the male “hotshot”²² who was the hegemonic and masculine form of policing. This finding was supported by my questionnaire²³ with over 72% of the participants agreeing that these roles of the ‘hotshot’ and ‘guardian stickler’ existed in detective media. It is important to note, however, as the question did not specifically ask about these roles in the timeframe of the 1970’s, these results may have been generalised. Furthermore, one respondent stated that “male characters portrayed as hotshots are generally arrogant and also as mentioned above, possess masculine traits and are thus, 'more favourable' and 'appealing' as a main character to the audience than a female detective would”. Through this it can be seen that the differences between masculinity and femininity in crime shows results in a restricted gender identity as characteristics such as “physical strength and emotional stoicism... are traditionally associated with male, rather than female, identity”²⁴.

Whilst women continued to be marginalised to an extent in crime shows, the late 20th Century and early 21st Century saw a reduction of the dichotomy between male and female detectives. Male detectives during this time continued to dominate screen time, however societies view of femininity started to shift in order to create a less narrow gender identity. Femininity in this time was seen less as a characteristic of “the sexy sidekick”²⁵ and more as an indicator of the “independent and heroic”²⁶ detective. This was due to 21st Century feminism’s use of the

¹⁹ (2013) *History of Women in Policing*. Available: <http://womenandpolicing.com/history/historytext.htm>.

²⁰ Leanne Martin. (1996). WOMEN POLICE IN THE MEDIA - FICTION VERSUS REALITY. . 1 (1), 4.

²¹ Michael F Aiello . (2013). *Policing the masculine frontier: Cultural criminological analysis of the gendered performance of policing*. Available: <http://cmc.sagepub.com/content/10/1/59.full>.

²² Ibid

²³ Questionnaire – Appendix A

²⁴ Annie Manion . (2015). *Between Victimhood and Power: The Female Detectives of Television’s Crime Dramas* . Available: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/between-victimhood-and-power-watching-the-female-detectives-of-television-crime-dramas>.

²⁵ Louisa Mellor. (2014). *The women taking over TV crime drama*. Available: <http://www.denofgeek.com/tv/happy-valley/30795/the-women-taking-over-tv-crime-drama>.

²⁶ Ibid

“media (as well as) social media to promote feminist movements, raise awareness, and call for justice.”²⁷ This was evident in the development of shows such as *Murder She Wrote* and *Law and Order SVU*, which each contained a strong female cast. These shows, whilst still having male characters, saw them starting to take the backseat while female representation started becoming more prominent in crime shows. This was supported in my interview²⁸ with Dr Emily Cachia as she stated that “drama is not dislocated from social and political contexts; if there is a changing demographic (in society)... this will necessarily be in dialogue with fictional representation of this in crime drama.” It must be noted, however, that the interviewee had limited knowledge on crime shows and answered the questions based on her knowledge on gender studies and behaviours. Nonetheless, this demonstrates how due to social changes, female representations in crime shows has increased overtime in order to challenge the stereotypical view that solving public crime and disorder is a strictly male profession. However, whilst these social changes have led to an increase of female representation in crime shows, the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity continues to prevail in society, further enculturating a narrow gender identity for both males and females.

“Detective heroes offer audiences models of an ideal manhood but they also reflect changing attitudes toward masculinity.”²⁹

²⁷Gina Messina-Dysert and Rosemary Radford Ruether. (2015). Online Feminism. In: Gina Messina-Dysert and Rosemary Radford Ruether *Feminism and Religion in the 21st Century* . New York : Routledge. 11.

²⁸ Interview – Appendix B

²⁹ Michael S. Kimmel, Amy Aronson. (2003). Detectives . In: Michael S. Kimmel, Amy Aronson *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia, Volume 1*. United States: Library of Congress Cataloging . 216.