Fuck politeness

Resistive discourse in the
My Favorite Murder fan community

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Abstract

True crime bliver typisk betragtet som en genre der appellerer mest til mænd grundet det voldelige indhold der typisk omhandler det kvindelige offer, men nyere studier viser at kvinder udgør hovedparten af true crime entusiaster.

Dette speciale vil belyse hvordan det kvindedominerede online fan-fællesskab udsprunget af den Amerikanske true crime/komedie podcast My Favorite Murder, fungerer som et rum hvori kvinder kan forhandle og modarbejde hegemonisk femininitet gennem deres fælles interesse for true crime. Analysen vil afdække hvordan podcast-værterne Karen Kilgariff og Georgia Hardstark diskursivt lægger et værdi-fundament for fan-fællesskabet som lægger op til forhandling af kønnede diskurser blandt deres fans, som populært går under navnet "murderinos", samt en dybere analyse af fansenes deltagelse i My Favorite Murder gennem fan-kunst og forhandlinger af samme diskurser.

Ved at analysere kønnede diskurser i form af kommentarer i MFM Facebook-gruppen og MFM's subreddit, samt en online-undersøgelse med 1000 murderinos, er målet at belyse hvordan hegemonisk femininitet bliver forhandlet og potentielt modarbejdet i fan-fællesskabet, og hvordan kvindeundertrykkelse angiveligt spiller en rolle i mange kvindelige fans' true crime fascination.

Som specialet vil demonstrere, insinuerer resultaterne at MFM-værternes narrativ fremhæver en solidaritet mellem murderinos som skaber et feministik rum hvor det er muligt for kvinder at italesætte emner igennem true crime, der i samfundet bliver undertrykt af patriarkalske normer. Dette kan potentielt påvirke de kvindelige murderinos til at aflære hegemoniske kønsnormer gennem specifikke fan-praksis. Dog peger en nylig konflikt i MFM Facebook-gruppen på at den feminisme der bliver udtrykt er begrænset i sin intersektionalitet og potentielt reproducerer hegemoni der ekskluderer etniske minoriteter.

INTRODUCTION

In January of 2016, the former Cooking Channel host Georgia Hardstark and actress, stand-up comedian and television writer Karen Kilgariff, began recording the true crime comedy podcast My Favorite Murder (MFM), on the couch in Hardstark's living room in Los Angeles. True stories about murder and comedy may not be two concepts one would think to go hand in hand, but after merely two months of recording, the podcast reached the number one spot on the iTunes comedy podcast chart and has stayed a regular on its Top 10 and has more than 10 million downloads a month[1].

Violent genres are commonly perceived as a masculine interest, however, research shows that true crime is, in fact, an overwhelmingly female interest (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). Critics claim that true crime is a traditionally misogynistic genre which incites fear and paranoia in its historically female audience (Vicary & Fraley, 2010; Browder, 2006; Caputi, 1987). However, studies show that many women enjoy true crime as it can offer women tools to cope with trauma (Browder, 2006).

The predominantly female community has been referred to as a "mental health support group" by The Atlantic, and a "sisterhood" by criminologist and author Scott Bonn (Marks, 2017). The hosts and fans refer to themselves as "murderinos", a title which is not exclusively given to fans of the podcast, but is also often used to describe anyone who loves true crime or exhibit vigilance in potentially dangerous situations, however, in this thesis "murderinos" will be used to refer to MFM fans. Being a murderino and part of the online community myself, I deemed it would be intriguing to delve into the factors which facilitate the "sisterhood" of murderinos, and investigate the discursive construction of particular gendered values within the community compared to those of "dominant culture" (which in this thesis will refer to dominant social norms of the Western world, particularly regarding gender) (Marshall, 1998).

The intention of this study is to examine how the MFM online community functions in women's lives as a particular cultural site within which they can articulate their resistance to patriarchy.

Hence, the research question of this thesis is:

How are hegemonic notions of femininity resisted and negotiated within the My Favorite Murder online fan-community?

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[1] myfavoritemurder.com & thewashingtonpost.com

Sub-questions:

- *How do values in the MFM community reflect the framing of gendered discourses of MFM?*
- *How does convergence culture play a role in building intimacy and emotional investment between murderinos and the main text?*
- *How can the subjugation of women be understood in relation to murderinos' community-building?*

In order to explore these questions, this thesis will draw upon fandom and convergence studies which are rewarding in creating an understanding of murderinos' participation and construction of the fandom. However, to create a deeper sociocultural understanding of the MFM fan community, I will draw upon cultural studies as well.

Reading guide

- First, *Methodology* will present how online ethnographic research and an online survey with 1000 murderinos were conducted
- Next, the contextual and theoretical chapter which will:
    - Present research and history of women and true crime.
    - Uncover hegemony and discourse theory to provide a foundation of knowledge for the conduction of an analysis.
    - Provide insight into previous studies of resistive practices of gender hegemony in a fandom, and thereby a lens through which to understand terminologies that will be drawn upon for this thesis.
    - Elucidate fandom and convergence theory to gain an understanding of participatory culture and fandoms as sites for resistance against hegemony.

- Then, a presentation of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and Frame analysis, which will provide a lens and focus through which I will analyze gendered discourses.

- Next, I will delve into the combined Frame and FCDA- analysis of the hosts' discourses regarding vigilance and rape culture, and further analyze their use of carnivalesque laughter and their discursive construction of murderino identity.
- Following is a FCDA analysis of excerpts of discourses between murderinos in the MFM Facebook group and the MFM subreddit.
- Then, the findings of the analytical chapters will be discussed and reflected upon in order to uncover the resistive affordances and limitations of the MFM Facebook group and subreddit.
- Finally, ideas for further research will be brought forth, and a conclusion to my research question will be presented.

Contextualization

In order to gain a more comprehensive insight into this particular fandom, it is essential to understand the gist of the podcast around which it revolves. The following will contain a brief introduction to My Favorite Murder, its involvement in its fandom, as well as an introduction of some of the essential themes expressed on the podcast.

In recent years, the true crime genre has risen dramatically in popularity. Netflix shows such as Making a Murderer, The Keepers and Manhunt: Unabomber, are just a few of the many true crime shows which have entered the popular streaming service over the last few years. However, it is not only the visual streaming sites which have tapped into the true crime trend. Since its origin in late 2004, podcasting has steadily grown in popularity, and in 2014 podcasting went from being a niche activity to becoming a mainstream media platform when the true crime podcast Serial became an instant phenomenon as it reached five million downloads in record time, and even a year after in 2015 the podcast was downloaded 500,000 times a day (Berry, 2015).

Karen and Georgia present their weekly chosen murders which include details of the investigations and biographical information about the killers as well as the victims. These stories are told with their own personal and comedic commentary that often emphasizes their personal experiences, and their underlying fear of eventually sharing the same fate as the many female victims whose stories they bring forward on the podcast. Hardstark often talks about the podcast as a way of lowering her risk of getting victimized, as one can hear on episode 8 - Eight is Enough Murders:

G: Hopefully this podcast will lower… like just on its merit alone will lower our percentage… like cause we've talked about it so the likelihood of it happening is less, right? Is that a thing?

K: (*Chuckles*) I've heard you say that now… eight times cause there's been eight episodes

G & K: (Laugh)

Their comedic and personal narratives involve their own experiences with mental health, drug, and alcohol addiction which are recurring topics in the podcast, and the listeners often get a lighthearted recap of the hosts' latest therapy session. An emphasis on vigilance and self-defense is pervasive on MFM, which is evident in the numerous catchphrases that originated as spontaneous humorous comments, but then were turned into mock inspirational posters, embroideries, greeting cards, clothing, tattoos etc, by murderinos. Among the many catchphrases are some of the most popular ones: "Call Your Dad, You're in a Cult", "Stay Out of the Forest", "Pepper Spray First, Ask Questions Later", "Don't get in that trunk", and the most popular one which also is the hosts' customary signoff: "Stay Sexy, Don't Get Murdered" often abbreviated to "SSDGM".

The central collection of MFM fan art can one find on MFM's Instagram account which is filled with different forms of fan-art from murderinos, often depicting the hosts, their sound technician Steven Ray Morris, as well as the hosts' pets, particularly Georgia's Siamese cat Elvis whose meow can be heard in the end of every episode[2]. As the images illustrate, the fans often participate in the podcast by making fan art that converges dominant mainstream media with specific MFM references. This will be further examined in A murderino production.

Murderinos call the hosts by their first names, Karen and Georgia, something I will do as well throughout this thesis. I have chosen to do so because the hosts are generally referred to as "Karen and Georgia" by murderinos, and themselves on the podcast which creates a sense of familiarity. Buzzfeed writer Scaachi Koul takes notice of this tendency, she writes: *"(...)everyone refers to them by their first names, like they're all friends with one key similar interest"* (Koul, 'Being "Polite" Often Gets Women Killed', 2017). [3] The quote captures the familiarity that fans feel towards the hosts, myself included, and as I am an active member of the fan community I have chosen to incorporate my fandom in my academic work.

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[2] Appendix 4 - Fan Art

[3] https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/scaachikoul/whats-your-favorite-murder

This brief introduction of the podcast sought to give the reader an insight into what My Favorite Murder is, in order to gain an understanding of the podcast that the community revolves around. The question of what MFM is and represents will further be examined in the analytical chapter. Within the analytical chapter, framing analysis and feminist critical discourse analysis will be applied with the aim of uncovering the framing of discourses within the podcast, as this will elucidate what the podcast represents.

I want to acknowledge that studying an online community will inevitably call for debate regarding the meaning of the term and if the MFM community can be defined as a community in the first place. A reflection and academic considerations regarding the term will be further clarified in the section *Community*.

The MFM community

Listening to MFM from the beginning, it quickly became apparent that a lot of people, especially women, were thrilled with the podcast. One can follow the expansion of the murderino community if listening to the episodes chronologically, as the hosts often discuss activity on the MFM social media platforms and listener email. The amount of listeners has rapidly grown since the beginning of the podcast.

The official MFM Facebook group currently contains 229.287 members, the MFM Twitter has 177.187 followers, MFM Instagram: 395.404, and MFM Reddit has 34.718 followers (visited 24.07.2018). On the podcast, the subject of the MFM community is often brought up by Karen and Georgia, often in context to their gratitude towards the community. Moreover, MFM and its community are often described as a "safe space" for people to escape the taboos and stigmas surrounding mental health. The MFM community has even caught the attention of various online news outlets, such as Huffington Post, The Atlantic, Rolling Stone, Metro and Junkee (Donahue 2018, Marks 2017, Fitzpatrick 2017, Kelly 2017, Lenton 2017).

Hardstark describes the murderino community to Rolling Stone as "a community of shit that you're not supposed to talk about in polite society, which everyone fuckin' thinks about constantly" (Hardstark in Fitzpatrick, 2017).

Being a murderino and a feminist, I wanted to research how the MFM community differ from dominant culture, and more specifically how the discourses express certain values of the community, and what this potentially could mean in terms of resisting patriarchal structures of dominant culture.

The following section elucidates the structures of the chosen online platforms which will be my field of study for my online ethnographic research. This will provide an understanding of how the technical frame around computer-mediated communication (CMC) between murderinos, and what the chosen online MFM communities entail.

Structures of MFM social media groups

Although I have chosen not to engage into deeper analysis of the correlation between online platforms and fan participation, In order to grasp any technologically-mediated community, it is relevant to create an understanding of the infrastructure of the given social media platform in which the community is established.

Facebook

In this thesis, the ethnographic work is mainly focused on the MFM Facebook group which is by far the largest MFM online community, containing over 220.000 members spread over numerous countries. Karen and Georgia are both administrators of the MFM Facebook group, but their engagement is limited. However, Steven (the sound technician) posts a weekly discussion thread whenever a new episode has dropped. Sometimes the hosts refer to fan activity on the podcast, particularly fan art and murderino meetups.

Facebook brings particular possibilities and logistics for the MFM community, a comprehensive description of Facebook is far beyond the scope for this thesis, therefore I will focus on the aspects of the platform which enable community-building.
There are currently over 300 MFM- subgroups or "spin-off" groups on Facebook, and new ones are created frequently. I have chosen not to conduct any research of other MFM groups on Facebook, due to their often dualistic framework which is often prominent in the titles (My Favorite Murder Furderinos, Complainernos, My Feminist Murder, etc.)[4]. The subgroups allow murderinos to gather in smaller groups with particular interests and group rules, an option that enables murderinos to construct mini-communities within a larger community.

The content of the official facebook group persists of posts, to which group members can comment or "like". It is possible to "tag" one's post, in order for people to quickly know what topics the post contains as well as collecting the tags for members to easily access specific types of content. The tags are displayed in the right margin of the group in the order

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[4]https://www.facebook.com/notes/my-favorite-murder-podcast/mfm-spinoff-groups/429410573895909/

of the most popular to least popular. Amongst the popular tags are: Hometown Murder (558), Shooting (362), Child Killing(356), TV (294), Unsolved Case (293), Stabbing (201), Sexual Assault (184) etc.

When murderinos post something in the group it first has to be approved by one of the fourteen group administrators whose job it is to filter out trolls and members who do not follow the guidelines of the MFM group.

Community conflict mid-research

In August 2018, the hosts announced a line of merchandise which contained a shirt with a print of a tipi/tent and their catchphrase "SSDGM" underneath. The merchandise received heavy criticism and accusations of cultural appropriation. The combination of the tipi and "SSDGM" was particularly controversial due to the high rates of murder and rape of indigenous women in the US and Canada ("Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women", n.d.). This started what murderinos since have named "the MFM dumpster fire" which alludes to the intense debates that arose about racism, white feminism, social justice etc. Moreover, Georgia "liked" an Instagram comment which defended the tipi-design and ridiculed the people who had taken offense, and around the same time a "home-town murder" with racist overtones was approved by a moderator and posted on the wall.

The hosts apologized on the podcast for their ignorance and paid $10.000 to the First Nations Development Institute, and Georgia further apologized for her "like" in, what she describes as "a fit of misguided indignation" (Episode 135). Furthermore, one or more murderinos of color were banned from the group by moderators for calling out racism. The "dumpster fire" is a thesis project in itself, and because it occurred after my data was collected, I deemed it was too late to incorporate new data and it would arguably cause a shift in focus. The hosts subsequently decided to "fire" all 14 volunteer-moderators and archive the Facebook group temporarily as the conflict felt "too big" for the hosts to manage.[5] The Facebook group still remains archived today which means that one cannot post, like or comment, but one can see posts and comments from before it was archived.

Although the "dumpster fire" will not be a point of focus in Analysis, I will draw upon it in Discussion in order to have a nuanced discussion of the MFM community as a potentially resistive space.

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[5] See Appendix 3

Reddit

Discursive examples of murderino interaction/negotiation will also be collected from the MFM subreddit which has more than 49.000 followers. The interface of Reddit allows murderinos to share pictures, memes, post, discussions etc. and comment on others' posts. One has a username, hence one's identity is secret which makes the platform a space where people can share their thoughts and opinions without any serious repercussions. It also means that gender and race are hidden, therefore it is not possible to make preconceptions about commenters unless they themselves make it clear. One can upvote posts and comments that one likes, and downvote what one does not like. In this sense, it is possible to create an understanding of what opinions and values are prominent amongst murderinos. The hosts are not (to my knowledge) a part of the MFM subreddit, however, one cannot be sure as the platform is anonymous.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve a deeper insight into how the My Favorite Murder fan-culture understand and transform cultural texts, I have conducted research of the fandom within the framework of Online Ethnography, autoethnography, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, while Qualitative and Quantitative methods were applied in the execution of the survey.

In order to grasp the two branches of ethnography, firstly, I will introduce some basic characteristics of ethnography itself.

Personal motivations

My interest in this topic comes from my own enthusiasm towards My Favorite Murder which began over a year ago when a close friend recommended it to me.

I heard my own personal fears of becoming a victim at the hands of male rage articulated, and more importantly, acknowledged. The comedic aspect of the podcast is crucial in order for me to listen, due to the horrifying nature of the theme. It works not only as a release of tension but as a coping with the aforementioned fears. The intimate, funny and spontaneous conversations which emerge (as well as the large amount of cursing) create the feeling of listening in on friends talking, which has established a sense of familiarity and connection to the hosts.

My enthusiasm for MFM is not without criticism. As a feminist, I sometimes cower when I hear the hosts underline an onus on women to "not be murdered". Moreover, I sometimes crave a more nuanced variety of crimes, as the hosts predominantly tell stories about the beautiful, white female victim, which stays in line with the traditional true crime narrative, but can obfuscate stories of minority women who are statistically more likely to be victims of violent crimes (Truman & Morgan, 2015; Sacks, 2017). However, I do appreciate that the hosts strive to be more inclusive by continuously correcting themselves in their small segment "corrections corner" where they respond to critique and corrections from fans, often regarding changing their language to be more socially inclusive.

Ethnography

Gobo Giampietro (2008) describes ethnographic methodology as revolving around the pivotal mode of 'observation'. What differs between ethnography and other methodologies is how the role of the 'protagonist' is assigned to observation (Giampietro, 2008: 5). When doing ethnographic research in a social context, being aware of how the research is affected by the researcher(s), is key (Davies, 1999). Charlotte A. Davies describes this as 'reflexivity' which means: "a turning back on oneself" (1999: 4). This describes the ongoing process of self-reference. Davies further asserts:

"The purpose of research is to mediate between different constructions of reality, and doing research means increasing understanding of these varying constructions, among which is included the anthropologist's own constructions" (Davies, 1999: 6).

Thus, Davies suggests that the purpose of ethnographic research is to arbitrate between different perceived realities of subjects', and further identify and make meaning of the underlying constructions of these perceived realities. However, the perceived realities of the subjects will further be perceived through the researcher's own worldview, as one cannot separate oneself from one's personal meaning-making processes.

Staying in the field of balancing one's involvement and detachment in research, the following is a reflection and theoretically framed articulation of my position as an ethnographic researcher as well as a fan within the community of inquiry.

Autoethnography and the aca-fan

Traditionally, many cultures visited and studied by anthropologists have been located within clearer boundaries, such as cities or villages (Boellstorff, 2012). The culture examined in this thesis, however, consists of multi-sited interactions between fans and are primarily situated online, where fans interact through CMC.

Because I am a member of the group being studied, a fan, and also the researcher, this can be more specifically defined as autoethnographic research.

The goal of ethnographic studies is *"an understanding of the cultural context in which human action takes place"* (Boellstorff, 2012: 16). In order to create this

understanding, it is arguably more beneficial to be familiar with the culture of the MFM community, than studying it as an outsider and risking not thoroughly comprehending the contexts of practices and traditions. Many fandom researchers have studied fandoms to which they belong themselves. Henry Jenkins is considered one of the first theorists who delved into fandom studies as a fan and an academic (aca-fan or scholar fan) (Jenkins, 2006a: 9). Matt Hill describes autoethnography as an approach *"(...)in which the tastes, values, attachments and investments of the fan and the academic-fan are placed under the microscope of cultural analysis."* (2002: 43). This account of autoethnography of fandom insinuates that the researcher should constantly question their subjective position in their studies, and further question that questioning, as what Hill defines as a form of "voluntary self-estrangement" (ibid). However, Busse & Hellekson (2009) assert, in Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet, that instead of thinking of it as voluntary self-estrangement, they view it rather as *"(...) an investment and as an awareness of our subject positions that creates a stronger, not a weaker, affect"* (2009:24). This emphasizes a hope of a shift in concern where one's identity as both an academic and a fan can be treated as equally important instead of separate and conflicting.

In terms of my identity as an academic and a fan/murderino, I elaborate on my subjective position and involvement in this thesis for the sake of transparency, as an acknowledgment of how my personal experiences shape my understanding of the MFM community.

What I aim to achieve is to uncover particular gendered discourses which inhabit MFM fanship and how they are expressed and negotiated within the community. This study will not claim universal relevance, it is merely an examination of a specific fandom.

The data discussed in this project is collected from the official My Favorite Murder facebook group, the official My Favorite Murder Reddit group, an online-survey conducted with traditions in both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Online Ethnography

In this thesis, online ethnography serves as a methodological framework in order to attain an insight into the MFM community building. Online ethnography seeks to study cultures and communities online through computer-mediated communication. Because of technology becoming more and more infused with everyday life, the distinction between offline and online is becoming increasingly blurred (Garcia et al, 2009). Garcia et al.(2009) argue that in order to effectively continue to explore the nature of specific subcultures and

social worlds, the experience of everyday life and how beliefs, values, and identities are constructed, ethnographers need to incorporate the internet and computer-mediated communication into their research for them to gain a deeper understanding of social life in contemporary society.

Much of the contact and interaction between members of the MFM online spaces are set online, however, more and more murderinos develop offline relationships as a result of going to live shows or joining a location-based sub-group. Hundreds of these sub-groups have been created, particularly in the US which offers the opportunity to connect with fellow murderinos nearby, and some members choose to arrange casual meet-ups where members can bond and share stories about murder. Although offline interaction occurs in the MFM community, like live-shows and events in local groups, much of the contact between members is conducted through CMC especially due to the cross-geographical audience. According to Garcia et al., locations for ethnographic research, such as the above mentioned, is *"feasible to limit the setting of the research to online/CMC phenomena"* (2009: 55). This suggests that the MFM online community will be satisfactory as the site of study for this thesis due to members primarily interacting through these online spaces.

There are different ways to conduct online ethnography. Garcia et al. (2009) assert that observation in online research contains watching images and text on a computer rather than observing people in offline settings. They argue that the technologically mediated environment still facilitates members' direct contact with the particular social world the ethnographer is studying because participants of that particular space communicate through online behavior. I am not merely a participant-observer within the MFM space, but a "participant experiencer" (Walstrom in Garcia et al., 2009). Garcia et al. describe the participant experiencer as "an active contributor to the group being studied" (2009, 58). This specifically refers to a researcher who is personally familiar with the group as well as the issues being discussed by participants of the group. This particular term suggests that in online groups the opportunity to directly observe other members is not available, however, the researcher can experience participating in the group by posting and reading messages (ibid). I have engaged in participant observation, commenting, liking and posting on the Facebook group, thusly my role can be understood as an observant participant (Hine, 2017:10). Jenkins (1992) argues that researcher participation is often just as important as observation, and due to the dissolving boundaries between ethnographer and community the members of the particular community have the option to *"actively challenge the account offered of their experience"* (Jenkins, 1992: 4). Hence, the members of a particular community are able to critique the researcher's narrative of their community.

Online survey

The aim of the online survey was to gain an insight into murderinos' relationship to My Favorite Murder and its online community.

The survey was conducted early in the research process and the questions asked were based on dominating discourses I had identified within the online community, in order to create an idea of murderinos' relationship to the podcast and the community.

Surveys are valuable and useful when the researcher seeks to describe the characteristics of a larger population or group of people (Babbie, 2016). Due to rapidly progressing technology, an online survey is not constrained to computers and laptops anymore, now anyone with a smartphone can answer an online survey (ibid).
The survey was created on the website Surveymonkey.com and I found out that the free usage of their service was confined to ten questions. This forced me to reformulate some of my questions, cut others, and change the question design in order to get the most out of the limited amount of questions. Some questions were designed with a multiple choice option where participants could check off one or more answers. Three questions out of ten were matrix/rating scale questions, where participants rated their agreement in various statements which were based upon dominant discourses within the MFM community.

Earl Babbie (2016) discusses the issue of validity within surveys. He explains: *"(...) people's opinions on issues seldom take the form of strongly agreeing, agreeing, disagreeing, or strongly disagreeing with a specific statement" (2016: 280)*. This points to the artificiality of surveys where the researcher forms the questions and answers, hence, the responses of the survey should be perceived as indicators of what the particular researcher was thinking when he/she framed the questions (Babbie, 2016). Babbie goes on to explain how validity in itself carries the presumption that there is a "real" definition of the subject being measured.

A few of the questions asked in the MFM survey focused on the feelings of the murderinos, such as the question "How has MFM affected you?" [6]where ten statements were presented underneath, to which the participants could check off the boxes of the answers that they felt were applicable to them. What makes this problematic in terms of validity is the fact that I, as a researcher, formulated the answers that are meant to represent other people's feelings and experiences which is difficult to put into boxes without a deeper insight

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[6] See Appendix 1

into the nuances of the lived experiences of the participants. Therefore, I decided to give them the option of writing a comment in the bottom of the questions for them to elaborate on their answers and obtain a more nuanced personal insight into the participants and their reasoning behind their answers.

By taking advantage of the flexible format of the rapidly developing online survey designs, I created the survey with a mixture of quantitative and qualitative characteristics in order to obtain more personal data formulated by the participants themselves. Jennifer Mason (2006) argue that mixing methods offers great potential for creating new ways of understanding *"the complexities and contexts of social experience, and for enhancing our capacities for social explanation and generalization."* (2006, 10). Mason explains that humans' social experiences and realities are multi-dimensional, therefore if one merely views these phenomena through a single dimension it may offer an inadequate understanding (ibid). There is a long qualitative tradition that perceives interpersonal everyday interactions, narratives and life experiences as informing about 'micro' experiences, but these experiences also express the changing economic and social conditions through which people live their lives (ibid). Mason thusly asserts *"(...) the macro is known through the lens of the micro – social change is charted in how it is lived and experienced in the everyday"*. Therefore, by conducting a mixed method survey, I aim to achieve a more nuanced understanding of murderinos' lived experiences.

After retrieving the data survey, amongst the hundreds of comments, one participant called me out on my "leading questions" and the lack of "not applicable"- option in the matrix questions. Seeing from her perspective, not aware of the ethnographic research behind the questions, and the fact that this thesis is not relying on the survey as its sole data I do understand her arguments. Instead of a "not applicable"-option, there was an "I don't know"-option. However, a few participants commented they were missing a neutral option in the matrix questions and had treated the "I don't know"-option as such. This has been taken into account for the analysis and future research, as well as an awareness of my role and biases as a researcher.

Due to the Facebook group being the largest MFM forum on social media and relevant to one of my survey questions, I wanted to post the survey in this group. Unfortunately, it did not become approved for reasons one can only speculate. However, I posted the survey on the MFM Reddit group. Within 22 hours 1000 responses were registered.

Ethical considerations and limitations

When conducting the research and gathering of online data, I wanted to apply ethical guidelines in order to be as respectful towards the subjects as possible. The referenced subjects' last names have been removed to ensure that their immediate identities are concealed. Furthermore, Helene Snee (2013) suggests that a key question, in the discussion on online research ethics, is whether or not the data appears to be private or public opinion. She further argues that it becomes problematic if the data is retrieved and repurposed in a way which is intrusive and/or exploiting subjects. My goal has at no point been of an exploitative nature, but merely to gain a deeper understanding of the discourses within the MFM platforms.

When I shared the survey on Reddit, I wrote in the post that I, myself, am a murderino and was writing my thesis on the MFM fan community. I quickly received numerous encouraging comments, but after a few hours, I was contacted on Reddit by one of the group-moderators due to one Reddit user's complaint that I had not included a consent-statement in the survey. The moderator asked me to add a comment addressing this issue for good measure, which I quickly did. I wrote a comment reassuring respondents that their answers were anonymous and would exclusively be used for my thesis.[7] Afterward, I investigated the ethics and found out that surveys, amongst other research methods, are "exempted from the need to obtain informed consent" (Babbie, 2015: 66). Which gave me some reassurance of the ethical standing of the survey.

The people behind the social media comments will be anonymous in order to preserve their privacy. Anonymity, in this case, does not entail that a person is untraceable from their presented data, as that can be nearly an "unattainable goal" in terms of qualitative research (van den Hoonaard, 2003). Hence, the ethical considerations of this thesis are rooted in the purpose of obtaining and analyzing data in a manner which respects the subjects of the MFM online platforms and the survey respondents.

In any study, the researcher often finds that certain limitations are set. Obstacles such as lack of time, lacking resources and funding and availability to access all perimeters can often limit the undertaken research. In the case of this study, I believe my data could have greatly benefited from having some type of semi-structured group-interview with a

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[7]
https://www.reddit.com/r/myfavoritemurder/comments/87vqjp/murderino_survey/?st=jjflxuv5&sh=99388873

small group of murderinos as it would allow me to examine the use of humor and in-group knowledge to a fuller extent. Furthermore, by limiting my online ethnographic research to the MFM Facebook group and the subreddit, I acknowledge that my findings are not representative of the entire MFM fandom. However, by identifying patterns in specific murderino discourses it can offer insight into the discursive construction of the fandom, and what this particular fandom culture may offer female murderinos.

I strongly considered also incorporating male murderinos' experiences of the fandom as it could contribute to a more holistic understanding of the fandom. However, due to my focus on women's resistive discourses, I deemed that incorporating men's accounts would steer the focus astray, as well as taking up too much space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis is rooted in *communication studies* and *cultural encounters* which will be combined in order to create a nuanced understanding of the *My Favorite Murder* fandom. This chapter will:

1. Offer an insight into research on women's relationship to true crime.
2. Uncover the terminology of hegemony.
3. Elucidate the field of discourse theory.
4. Display how Mary Ellen Brown's research on Soap Opera and Women's Talk (1994) offers a lense and terminology to understand resistive practices within the MFM community. Uncover existing research and theory on Fandom, particularly in context to fandoms as sites of resistance.
5. Present theory on convergence and podcasting, and clarify how the two are interconnected.

Women and true crime

This chapter seeks to elucidate research on why true crime readers are overwhelmingly female. This is noteworthy as it offers insight into the sociocultural aspects of many women's fascination with the genre, particularly in context to their subjugation in dominant culture.

True crime and narrative

University of Richmond professor Laura Browder[8] (2006) explains in *Dystopian Romance: True Crime and the Female Reader* that true crime is a genre which has been around since the 1960s, where the thick and lengthy paperbacks started popping up on bookshelves. The genre is predominantly written with the victim(s) being female, and the killer being male. When a book is labeled "true crime" it promises a factual foundation from which the reader can expect lengthy descriptions of events, as well as photographs from the lives of the victims and killers and the violent crime scenes, the latter often not being

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[8]Browder information: https://english.richmond.edu/faculty/lbrowde2/

available through other mediums due to its grizzly content (Browder, 2006). Jean Murley, the author of *The Rise of True Crime: 20th Century Murder and American Popular Culture* (2008) defines the true crime genre as a "murder narrative" which presents real-life events tinted by the author's personal values and beliefs (Murley, 2008: 6). Due to the interwoven personal bias that authors inevitably infuse in these stories of true crime, Murley explains how these stories reflect the social contexts of the times in which they are written, hence depicting the shifts in common convictions regarding religion, definitions of insanity, and the changing views on mystery and the notion of radical evil. Like traditional true crime narratives, the hosts of MFM also frame the stories on the podcast which depict their realities and convictions. This will be a focus of analysis in order to uncover how the hosts discursively frame gendered discourses on the podcast. Analyzing MFM discourse will enable further analysis of how murderinos negotiate particular values expressed through the hosts' framing which will subsequently facilitate a discussion of the MFM community as a potentially resistive space.

A how-to guide for personal survival

According to Browder true crime books are read not for plot, but for the comprehensive and detailed description and analysis which offer an insight into what went wrong (Browder, 2006). Browder writes:

"For even as these books posit the existence of socially inexplicable deviance—pure evil, in short—they also reaffirm notions of causality, by encouraging the reader to participate in a voyeuristic dissection of the victim's mistakes, her failure to read obvious clues."
 (ibid: 931).

This insight into the criminal mind and behavior has become what readers expect from the true crime genre. By learning about the behavior and mind of a killer, the reader will learn to identify signs of potentially dangerous people. True crime has been widely criticized for being unnecessarily pornographic and misogynistic, with no other purpose than provoking fear of violence in its broad female audience (Browder, 2006). Amanda M Vicary and R. Chris Fraley (2010) published a study called *Captured by True Crime: Why Are Women Drawn to Tales of Rape, Murder and Serial Killers?* in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science* in which they conducted research to find out why women found the true crime genre more enjoyable than men do. Their study shows that

while war histories are viewed as a masculine genre with its depiction of destruction, death, and violence, true crime has been widely critiqued for its distasteful exploitation of tragedy and suffering (Vicary & Fraley, 2010).

Women's Fear of Violence & True Crime as Coping Technique

One might assume that men would be the more obvious guess as true crime enthusiasts due to extensive research suggesting that men are the more aggressive sex (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). In 2007 men in the United States committed 79 % of aggravated assaults and 90 % of murders (FBI in Vicary & Fraley; Cooper & Smith 2017). Research shows that men are more likely to be victims of crime, however, research shows that women fear becoming victims more so than do men, also known as "the fear of crime paradox" (Allen in Vicary & Fraley, 2010; Mellgren & Ivert, 2018; Sacks, 2017). There are different explanations for the paradox, e.g. women are physically weaker and thusly easier targets, and experiencing sexual harassment is common for women worldwide which remind them of their vulnerable position (Mellgren & Ivert, 2018). Vicary & Fraley suggest this could be why women are more interested in true crime books than men, as the potential fitness-relevant/survival cues in the books may be helpful to a woman in danger. University of Richmond professor Laura Browder writes:

"In a world in which women fear violence, but are culturally proscribed from showing an interest in violence, true crime books provide a secret map of the world, a how-to guide for personal survival—and a means for expressing the violent feelings that must be masked by
femininity." (2006: 929).

She suggests that women are not supposed to show an interest in violence as it is not deemed appropriate by society, but as earlier mentioned, reading true crime can offer an insight into the violence many women fear while also offering know-how in order to get out of threatening situations.
Browder (2006) asserts that women often thought of these true crime stories as a profound encounter with truth, and reading them as a brave act of facing reality instead of turning one's back on them. According to this statement, true crime allows women to gaze into the void and face *"the terror suffered by crime victims and of their own traumatic memories—and to survive."* (ibid). It then becomes a way of dealing with trauma and fear while getting out

alive. This suggests that true crime can function as a way for some women to not feel alone in their abusive relationships and potentially provide tools for them to identify the abuse. Browder writes that for some women, true crime may simply satisfy a need for thrills, but for others, it may provide a way of coping with trauma. For women who have experienced violence themselves, or are survivors of trauma, their memories of that violence tend to be incoherent and fragmented. Browder explains how true crime can possibly offer a narrative for women who have survived violence. By reading true crime, in which the killer is often captured in the end and evil is punished, survivors of violence may be able to find some meaning, and possibly a happy ending, to stories similar to their own (Browder, 2006). Despite the possible therapeutic effects of true crime, Browder goes on to say that it offers no escape out of *"the universe of victims and perpetrators"* (2006: 940). In very few true crime books the victim survives, and there is no safety to find in true crime when it comes to the danger which could be occurring next door or even in one's home. However, Browder asserts that consuming true crime may enable women who are in abusive relationships to leave their spouse before it is too late. The sad fact is, however, that women who leave abusers are especially in danger of getting murdered by them (Browder, 2006). The possibility for readers to move on by reading true crime is limited, and it does not work for all. Browder explains that the genre offers no new insight, but merely allows the reader to *"move through the cycle of crime and punishment over and over"*(ibid: 941).

Insidious Trauma

Staying in the trauma realm, writer and social science researcher Joanne Muzak (2009) wrote the article *Trauma, feminism, and Addiction* in which she situates women's everyday experiences of interpersonal violence in context to trauma theory, more specifically the development of "insidious trauma" which is *"traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at a given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit"* (Brown in Muzak, 2009: 29). This means that "insidious trauma" is an effect of institutionalized oppression which is the everyday devaluing of an individual because of characteristics of their appearance and identity differ from what is considered valuable by those who are in power (Root in Muzak, 2009: 29). "Insidious trauma" can thusly contribute to an individual, as well as an entire group of marginalized individuals, experiencing symptoms such as paranoia, depression, anxiety and substance abuse (Muzak, 2009). "Insidious trauma" explains how trauma is also gendered, not suggesting that men do not experience trauma, but that many women share a specific form

of trauma that is linked to their experiences as women e.g. living in a culture in which the female body is sexually objectified (Muzak, 2009; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

This is particularly relevant in terms of creating an understanding of why the MFM audience is overwhelmingly female and what this kind of trauma may mean as a factor in the community-building and bonding amongst murderinos, which will be further explored in *Community Analysis* and *Discussion.*

Hence, the true crime genre has, according to the research presented in this chapter, different attributes which are proven to be distinctly popular with women. Learning the behavior of a killer may enable the true crime reader to better identify them in real life, and learning different survival strategies can make women feel less powerless in a dangerous situation (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). Moreover, the genre allows women to confront the fear of violence under safe conditions, and for some, it can offer a way of coping with this fear. It is important to note that many women simply like the genre for its entertainment values and that not all true crime fans are victims of abuse or read true crime as a coping mechanism (Browder, 2006).

Elucidating existing data on the relationship between women and true crime in this thesis offers an understanding of the underlying structures of why many women feel attracted to the genre. It further offers an understanding of the MFM community within a bigger sociocultural context, where women are expected to not have any interest in violence (Browder, 2006).

The following chapter uncovers the notion of hegemony which will provide an insight into the power dynamics within a particular culture. Creating an understanding of hegemony enables a deeper analysis of power and how MFM discourses may seek to resist particular gendered norms.

Hegemony

In order to fully comprehend and analyze particular gendered discourses within the MFM community, it is beneficial to understand how hegemony is expressed within this subculture and how this differs from the hegemonic structures of contemporary society. This chapter aims to provide some insight into the terminology of hegemony. Instead of a long and in-depth account of the extensive body of theoretical work of the term, this introduction to hegemony will be brief yet beneficial in order to grasp how the MFM community reproduce and resist hegemonic notions.

Mary Ellen Brown (1994) explains that hegemony holds particular ways of viewing the world around us, ourselves and others due to the dominance and power of those others. Hegemony can be described as a form of class rule which not only exists in political and economic institutions but in different forms of consciousness and experience as well. The concept of hegemony becomes particularly important in societies which revolve around public opinion and voting and view these electoral politics as significant (Brown, 1994). Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci has been regarded as synonymous with the notion of hegemony because of his extensive work and theorization of the term (Joseph, 2002). Gramsci (1999) argues that the sovereignty of a social group (or class) can manifest itself in two ways: 'domination/coercion' and 'intellectual and moral leadership' (1999: 591). The latter form of sovereignty enacts hegemony, and, according to Gramsci, this form of social control not only influences human behavior and choice in an external sense but further influences people internally by shaping personal convictions into copies of the prevalent norms of society (1999: 592). These internalized norms are based in hegemony, which as Joseph V. Femia (1981) argues: *"(...) refers to an order in which a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour"* (Femia, 1981: 24).
Thus, hegemony can be understood as a naturalization and dominance of particular ways of thinking and acting.

Raymond Williams (1977) describes hegemony as following:

"It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values - constitutive and constituting - which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in society, a sense of absolute because experienced, reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives." (Williams in Brown, 1994: 4).

The sense of reality, which Williams here mentions, is encouraged by the notion of common sense, which naturalizes the ruling class and disguises it as a natural status quo. This naturalization of hegemony thus restricts people from questioning unequal power relationships, hence preserving, in this case, the subordination of women. Williams further states: *"(...) no dominant social order and therefore no dominant outline ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention"* (ibid: 5). This means that there will always be emergent cultural elements which will oppose the dominating realm and instead represent the achievements, aspirations and human

experiences which the dominant culture structurally obfuscates, opposes, represses or simply cannot identify (Williams in Brown, 1994; Femia, 1981).

What Williams calls "emergent culture", politics such as of the feminist movement, shows that there will always be a counter-hegemonic consciousness fighting for acknowledgment and recognition, hence fighting to gain political and economic power (Brown, 1994).

Hence, the purpose of incorporating the concept of hegemony is to uncover the gendered power structures as I study the way in which murderinos make meaning of their fandom. In my analysis of the MFM fan practices, the notions of hegemony allows for inquiry of the "sense of reality" rooted in meanings and values which dominate in society, and how these meanings and values are resisted and reproduced within the MFM community.

Discourse Theory

The word "discourse" is dominating the theoretical as well as analytical chapters of this thesis, hence a clarification of the term to underline its relevance within this particular academic work is worthwhile.

Stuart Hall asserts that the term "discourse" is normally used as a linguistic concept which means *"passages of connected writing or speech"* (Hall in Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001: 72). In Hall's 1997 literary piece *"Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse"* (re-published in *Discourse Theory and Practice (2001)* by Wetherell, Taylor & Yates), Hall offers his account of Foucault's work on discourse in context to representation and language, and asserts that by "discourse" Foucault meant a way of presenting knowledge about a particular subject at a particular moment in history (Hall in Wetherell et al., 2001: 72). Hall argues that discourse is not only a linguistic notion, but is both about language *and* practice (ibid). He writes: *"It [discourse] governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others."* (Hall in Wetherell et al., 2001:72).

Thus, a discourse can be viewed as dictating specific ways of talking about topics and determining the acceptable way to behave, talk and write in society.

Foucault (1972) affirms that the term refers to an institutionalized way of writing or speaking about reality, and how this defines what can be commonly said and thought about the world, and what cannot. He writes:

"(...) it [discourse] appears as an asset — finite, limited, desirable, useful — that has its own rules of appearance, but also its own conditions of appropriation and operation; an asset that consequently, from the moment of its existence (and not only in its 'practical applications'), poses the question of power; an asset that is, by nature, the object of a struggle, a political struggle." (Foucault, 1972: 120).

In this sense, discourse can be understood as inherently fixed as an expression of power, meaning that the way people speak and write on a daily basis reflects the power structures in their society because society is defined by power structures and struggles. When Foucault describes discourse as a limited asset, he addresses the limitations of individual interpretation of discourse due to what he calls *"rules of discursive formation"* which refers to the systems that make interpretations possible in the first place (Foucault, 1972: 120). Studying and analyzing discourses should then, according to Hall, acknowledge that a different discourse will appear in a future historical moment, overrule the existing one and produce new conceptions of the given discourse (Hall, 2001: 74). Hence, discursive formations emphasize certain perceived realities which invoke a particular way of talking about and treating certain subjects bound to a particular time in history (ibid).

Creating an understanding of the notion of discourse and how it operates as expressions of power is relevant for the further inquiry of the discourses within the MFM community and the uncovering of the gendered nature of social power, and how these systems of power are reproduced and resisted within the fan community that is predominantly female. This will be examined through tools of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis which will be further elaborated on in *Analytical Framework*.

Similar to "discourse", the term "community" is essential to this thesis and will appear frequently throughout. The following chapter will illuminate the question of 'what constitutes a community?' and touch upon the ongoing theoretical discussion of this question.

Community

As mentioned in *Contextualization*, the notion of "community" can be rather challenging to define as one cannot delimit the term to a specific place. As Nancy Baym (1998) points out, the term community appeared appropriate for the new social realms emerging online, however, it has proven to be quite a loaded term in academia due to its *"descriptive, normative and ideological connotations"* (Baym, 1998: 35). The connotations

referred to here are grounded in the conditions of the physical world, such as face-to-face interaction, which many scholars argue are key to community (Baym, 1998). Studying a phenomenon such as MFM which spans over several online platforms, and in some cases in offline settings, can become rather complicated (Boellstorff, 2012). Celia Pearce discusses the meaning of community in her book *Communities of Play* (2009). She refers to German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies who described the term community (Gemeinschaft) as *"an association of individuals with a collective will that is enacted through individual effort"* (Tönnies in Pearce, 2009: 5). Pearce further suggests that communities are *"characterized by affiliations around a group identity that includes shared customs, folkways, and social mores"* (Pearce 2009: 5). Using this logic, one can argue that My Favorite Murder's "community" is in fact a community due to the thousands of self-proclaimed murderinos and their shared love of the podcast. However, can one really define a fandom-community based on a mutual interest? And if you are a fan, are you then automatically a part of the community? Some fans may believe the fandom they are a part of is a community, while other fans may not. It may be problematic to speak of all MFM fans as one unified community due to fans being spread out in different clusters on different online platforms and the hundreds of subgroups which all have their own specific additional interest besides the podcast itself. Baym (1998) refers to Benedict Anderson's (1983) argument that online communities are "imagined communities", a theory which has led many computer-mediated communication (CMC) scholars to research the "style" in which a given online community is imagined, instead of the authenticity of the community. Baym argues that the "style" of a community *"is shaped by a range of preexisting structures, including external contexts, temporal structure, system infrastructure, group purposes, and participant characteristics"* (Baym, 1998: 38). These structures culminate into a set of systematic social meanings which creates the conditions for fans to imagine themselves as a community, hence enabling an emergence of *"group-specific forms of expression, identities, relationships, and normative conventions"* (Baym, 1998: 38).

Kilgariff and Hardstark, as well as murderinos, are continuously referring to the murderino/MFM "community", which demonstrates that there is a broad consensus between participants that there in fact is a group identity. The feeling of finally 'belonging to a community' is persistently brought up by murderinos on the MFM facebook group, as well as in the "Hometown murder" emails, which are read out loud by the hosts on the weekly mini-episodes. The negotiation of values within the MFM community, as expressed through discourses and practices within the community, will be the key focus throughout this thesis.

Continuing in the realm of community, Mary Ellen Brown (1994) wrote the book *Soap Opera and Women's Talk* in which she uncovers her research of a community of daytime soap opera fans which mainly consists of women. She explores how hegemonic notions of femininity and womanhood can be accepted, and/or negotiated, and resisted in the process of soap opera consumption. Brown's inquiry of how hegemony is not set in stone, but is instead "leaky", offers a theoretical framework in which the notion of resistive discourse will provide theoretical tools to study gendered hegemony within the MFM community. The following will elucidate parts of Brown's research and findings, which will play a key role throughout this thesis.

Women's talk

When people speak of what is normal, it depicts a perceived reality in which both dominant and subordinate groups of people share the same experiences and interests (Brown, 1994). Brown (1994) explains how an uneven distribution of power seeks to suppress conflict. She adds that an open acknowledgment of inequality, contradiction, and conflicts has a tendency to threaten the status quo and naturalized beliefs, power relations and values, which follow.

"Power relationships are determined by recognizable differences from or "otherness" to the most powerful group. These differences are often sex, race, sexual preference, class, ethnic, age, or appearance based." (Brown, 1994, 22).

Brown further argues that the powerful define the norm, and thereby have access to the construction of social control, more particular the construction of knowledge, language and meaning-making which hold the privilege to conceptualize so-called "proper" thought, ideas, behavior, and beliefs for the culture. This chapter will seek to uncover Brown's exploration of how women, as one of the numerous subordinated groups in Western society, use, what Brown defines as "feminine discourse" to oppose their positioning in dominant culture as invisible, compliant, irrelevant and subordinate. The notion of "feminine discourse" will offer a way to understand the discourses and discourse-making practices within the MFM community and how they position themselves in context to hegemonic notions.

Brown (1994) explains that watching soap operas is not a popular act. Much like true crime, soap operas are commonly perceived as trash TV and the viewers are in fact aware that watching the shows is not socially valued, however, they continue to watch and talk

about them, partially due to the communal activity. Viewers experience what Brown calls "*re*active pleasures", *"pleasures that come from an understanding that one's ideological positioning is problematic in our culture"* (Ibid, 1994, 18). This means that fans feel pleasure from the conversations which arise from the discomfort they feel when they see the contradictions of their social positions depicted on TV through the soap opera narrative. Brown states that women's position in society as a silenced majority has made them individually and collectively aware of the pleasures of talking with other women (Ibid, 1994:18). Much of this active pleasure, she states, is generated merely from the option of speaking freely in many all-women groups, free from censure and ridicule. Furthermore, some women find pleasure in simply seeing and hearing other women talk about their feelings and experiences, due to the difficulties that women often face with expressing their feelings and ideas in "man-made" language (Brown, 1994). This particular focus is prevalent within the MFM community, and the ways in which the community, as a woman-dominated space, situate themselves through discourses in context to male-dominated society will be a field of inquiry in *Analysis.* This is particularly relevant in the field of crime and violence in which (as described in *Women and true crime*) women are not "supposed" to be interested.

Brown points out that the debate of how popular culture and pleasure are based on the notion that if people experience pleasure it will keep them happy instead of encouraging unrest, which may potentially further social change. However, Brown argues that social change does not always take its form in the shape of open rebellion, but is instead a product of when people share their personal experiences with oppression. Often, these experiences are silenced by hegemonic constraints on a discourse which eventually result in oppressed people being unaware that other people share that oppression. When people realize that their problems are not, in fact, individual, but collectively shared, they can begin to deconstruct the *"structural nature of the problem"* (Ibid, 1994, 19). This notion of social change in the form of quiet discursive rebellion will be further explored in the analysis of the gathered data in context to the sharing and negotiation of female murderinos' experiences.

Brown claims that women who form relationships with other women through discussions and gossip about soaps and engage in communal watching practices, can create a solidarity in this community that may pose as a threat to dominant ideological systems. The notion of hegemony refers to power as something which is never fixed, but instead as something which is continuously renegotiated, hence people's reception of popular culture and the media is not passive but mediated, usually through spoken discourse. Brown suggests that: *"Gender alliances can be just as political as class alliances, and both are inserted into complex matrixes of identity that broaden and extend*

counterhegemonic possibilities." (Ibid, 1994, 19). This suggests that when women's struggle transcend from the political sphere to the cultural sphere it launches a potential for social change.

Women's speech, in certain contexts, is not taken seriously. Looking at groups of both men and women, women's comments are often left ignored, women's ideas are often attributed to others, and women are interrupted more often than men (Ibid, 1994: 33). Brown further explains that women can be viewed as a "muted" group, meaning that women's speech is often limited both individually and institutionally due to women's lack of social control and power. It is important to point out that understanding "woman talk" is not assured by gender alone. There are different forms of "woman talk" which is rooted in the many various positions from which women from different mixes of power and oppression stemming from e.g. race, class and ethnic differences. bell hooks (1981) suggests that these different positions of women are what create a foundation from which women learn to speak and hear different versions and variations of "woman talk".

"When women talk over class, race, or ethnic boundaries about their lives and interests with an awareness of their mutual oppression, then talk is mutually validating and therefore often pleasurable and potentially empowering." (Brown, 1994: 33).

This suggests that because of society's general devaluing of women's talk, a situation in which their talk is appreciated and validated can create confidence and potentially an ability to speak again.

Brown explains that in order to understand the relation between oppression and women's talk, the subordinated groups must identify their own subordinate status and the oppressive strategies being used by the dominant group. Those strategies must be resisted, and this may be possible through the resistive strategies which are evident in women's oral discourse as listed above. A form of resistive practice can be identified in what Brown calls *"feminine friendship practices"* which she argues *are often counterhegemonic to dominant notions that women cannot get along with each other because of rivalries over men"* (Brown, 1994: 97). This emphasizes the prevalent notion that women are inevitably competitors over the attention of men, and how a community of mostly women automatically rejects that notion by assembling and engaging with each other. This leads to the next subchapter which aims to illuminate resistive actions through humor and what Brown calls 'feminine spaces'.

Breaking the rules

My Favorite Murder is currently one of the most successful comedy podcasts out there. The fact that an all woman-hosted comedy podcast is on top of the charts is, considering the tradition of male domination in comedy *and* podcasting, beating the odds (Radulescu, 2012; Markman, 2012). This chapter seeks to highlight the role of "women's humor" and its subversive powers in society. Uncovering this subject will offer an insight which will be later utilized to understand how humor in the MFM podcast and its community, may potentially be resistive.

As a part of her research, Brown (1994) interviewed groups of women soap opera fans. She found that laughter plays a big role, specifically in the acknowledgment of the existing absurdities in society. What is known as "carnivalesque laughter", is humor marked by a satirical or mocking against authority and hegemonic social hierarchies, which creates a position of defiance within women's discursive networks which ultimately become the networks which define reality (Brown, 1994: 149; Radulescu, 2012). Women's "(in)ability"to be funny has a long history in popular debate, Domnica Radulescu writes:

"(...) women's humor has largely been left unrecognized at best and censured or crushed at worst, for two main reasons: being often a humor which subverts and mocks patriarchy, it has been perceived as threatening to men; secondly, being often different in nature, in the object of laughter and in the forms of expression from male humor, and therefore not meeting the canonical standards of male humor, it has been dismissed as non-humor" (Radulescu, 2012: 13).

Radulescu asserts that due to women's humor often making aspects of patriarchy the subject of their joke, it has been received poorly by men. Moreover, due to women's humor not following the expression and nature of male humor, women have been deemed 'not funny' in society (Radulescu, 2012). In this way, women have been *"excluded from the comedic tradition except as the object of male humor and have been assigned the 'responsive behavior,' that is, smiling and laughing at men's jokes."* (Auslander in Radulescu, 2012: 13). Thusly, women have been conditioned to be the polite and appreciative audience instead of the producers of comedy. However, when women acknowledge their subordination in the form of joking, they claim their power and break boundaries, hence the inversion of power becomes a threat to dominant institutions and overstep the limits of constraining female politeness (Brown, 1994). In this way, humor (much like true crime) can

offer a non-traditional way of coping and healing. Feminine humor often functions as a way to create familiarity and intimacy by focusing on commonalities and by using self-deprecatory humor (Kotthoff, 2006; Mintz, 1985). Thusly, comedy can operate as therapy by allowing women to critique and make fun of their daily struggles, hence allowing people to bond over their shared experiences and struggles which can help cope with the dark reality of such struggles (Gilbert, 1997).

Brown writes that in the moment of watching the soap operas, the viewer's pleasure may lie in what she sees and hears, but afterward in conversation, the elements of the soap opera become intertwined with elements of real life, and these same ideas take form in humor. Rituals become a process through which groups and individuals come to make meaning of their world. Television viewings can be such a ritual process, and this process can be perceived as an "in-between stage" where one is neither in nor outside of social structures. Brown explains:

"Like the beach that is neither on land nor in the sea, such spaces allow rules to be broken , roles to be reversed, categories and restrictions to be ignored." (Brown, 1994: 150). Because nobody can completely be outside social structures that make up culture, it is in this middle, the in-between, that one can create alternative ways of acting and being. Here, the reworking of one's marginal position created by the dominant, take place, and internalized ideologies are broken through. Brown points out that one can find this defiance in women's laughter and parody of the dominant, and if only for a short time, they refuse to take seriously the social constraints which they face on a daily basis.

She further argues that women's talk is not always resistive, but talk which recognizes oppression instead of denying it will likely challenge the prevalent ideological assumptions, thereby identifying the construction of women in discourse which makes it potentially resistive. Thus, having these "feminine" spaces where women discuss and talk, enables them to work out issues and thereby work them into their own consciousness. The supportive community then provides a social support system which can help women carry out these decisions in practice. It is this kind of 'feminine space' and the resistive practices within it, that this thesis aims to uncover in context to the MFM community. By delving into discursive interactions between murderinos in *Analysis*, it can potentially uncover the extent to which the community can function as, what Brown describes as "the beach", the in-between, where one can qua one's interest in true crime, negotiate one's marginalized position.

In summary, women creating discourse around societal structures that seek to oppress them, either through humor or by simply speaking with other women within the

"feminine spaces", can, according to Brown, potentially creative resistive discourse which challenges hegemonic gender norms.

The following will briefly articulate Brown's account of how feminism encouraged women to abandon the normalized competition amongst them, and how "women's talk" enabled them to unite (Brown, 1994).

Women's talk and feminism

Brown (1994) explains that before the 1970s women's movement (in this case Britain, the United States, and Australia), it was difficult to speak about women's oppression. Feminism enabled women to talk about the inherent contradictions in their gender roles. She further explains that the movement used the tool of consciousness-raising, which was viewed as a form of gossip, however more formal and with a purpose (1994: 31). Women would gather and speak about their personal problems, finding out that many of their problems were in fact not individual, but widely shared by other women, leading to the idea (and popular slogan of the 70s) that the personal is political (Brown, 1994: 9). Through women's talk, Brown argues, it became apparent that what had been perceived as personal problems, were in fact a system of structural limitations seeking to oppress them. *"Where women were ideologically conditioned not to trust other women and to compete with each other for a man (and thus economic survival), talking together built trust among women"* (Brown, 1994: 179). The competitiveness between women had up until the women's movement been normalized and encouraged, but through talk amongst women it opened up new opportunities for women as a collective group as it enabled them to gain their voices, to speak and to be heard.

Brown's work articulates how "women's talk" can carry the potential of resisting the hegemonic structures of society and how spaces dedicated to something as mocked as soap operas can inhabit discourses which, in their very nature, are resisting the social norms that seek to subjugate women.

The following chapter will explore the realm of fan spaces. Here, the aim is to offer insight into how fans build communities based on their relationships to the main text, and how fan communities can express political and critical discourses (Jenkins, 1992).

Fandom

This chapter will delve into influential theories of fan practices in order to create an understanding of how the different communicative and cultural components of fan communities work. The chapter will particularly focus on fan communities as a place for resistance against the cultural norms of larger society. This theoretical aspect of fandom as a resistive force will serve as an essential part of this thesis in order to examine the practices within the murderino community and how they may potentially resist hegemonic notions of femininity.

Fandom research often focuses on the fandoms of fictional visual media products such as TV-shows and movies. The theories brought forth in this chapter are also concerned with fandoms of fictional visual media, however, I deem that many of the processes and practices of these fandoms are applicable to the MFM community despite it being a podcast and dealing with true events. This will be further argued in *Discussion*. Moreover, creating an understanding of fan practices can further an understanding of how podcasting may encourage different forms of fan practice and engagement, this will be further explored in *Discussion*. Before uncovering different theorists' accounts of how fan communities can potentially be sites of resistance, an introduction to the field of fandom theory will be elucidated.

Delving into the My Favorite Murder fandom calls for some clarification of what being a fan means. Professor in media and journalism Cornel Sandvoss defines fan practice as follows:

"The regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text in the form of books, television shows, films or music, as well as popular texts in a broader sense such as sports teams and popular icons and stars ranging from athletes and musicians to actors." (Sandvoss, 2005: 8)

Podcasting did not become a medium until 2004, and arguably when one thinks of popular icons today, thoughts do not immediately go to podcast hosts (Berry, 2016). However, *My Favorite Murder* has become quite the popular narrative of a particular kind of subculture, and while Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark are not names most people know, they are important figures for a limited, although extensive, community.

Cornel Sandvoss asserts that fandom first attracted attention from the media and scholars in the 1980s (Ibid, 2005). He explains that a pathologization of the fan through the

mass media has functioned as a scapegoat to explain horrific events such as the Columbine shooting, hence accentuating the individual instead of structural forces when analyzing contemporary life (Ibid, 2005). In contrast, in the earlier scholarly work on fandom, there was an emphasis on structure instead of the agency of the individual. Sandvoss writes: *"In both approaches fandom is interpreted as a consequence of mass culture needing to compensate for a lack of intimacy, community and identity"* (Ibid, 2005: 2). In this way, if the fan is depicted as a perpetrator, then he or she is simultaneously the passive victim (ibid). According to Sandvoss, it was this depiction of fandom as being a consequence of cultural or psychological dysfunction which sparked the academic interest in the 1980s and spurred on a body of ethnographic and auto-ethnographic research which uncovered a more complicated notion of fandom than simply being a consequence of structural confines within popular culture (Sandvoss, 2005). This work was not only a theoretical and analytical representation of fandom, but it further took the stance of political representation which opposed a common fear of popular culture and instead gave a voice to social groups of marginalized people (ibid). Thus, the understanding of the fan grew from trivialization to an acknowledgment of the political and critical forces which carry the potential to create change. Today, with the arrival of the internet and other information technologies, fandom has become a normal part of everyday life in the industrialized world and is incorporated in marketing strategies (Sandvoss, 2005).

Sandvoss notes that the academic research on fandoms does not necessarily cover all kinds of fans and their fan activities, instead the research focuses on *"(...) specific social and cultural interactions, institutions and communities that have formed through the close interactions of committed groups of fans in a subcultural context" (2005: 5).*

This suggests that the given fandom has its own characteristics and that fandom, in general, cannot be defined with a "one size fits all"- definition.

Since 1992 technological developments have impacted fandoms and the ways in which fans interact with each other and participate in their fan communities. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) has in past years, according to Bury (2017), disrupted the broadcasting model, and expanded the possibilities for participatory culture and opened up several different ways for a person to enter a fandom. Community has always been the center of participatory media culture (Bacon-Smith in Bury, 2017), and the online community was according to Mark Poster (1995) the heart of what he named "the second media age" which entails the arrival of the then new developments of digital media.

Professor of communication, journalism and cinematic arts Henry Jenkins wrote an essay in the book *The Adoring Audience* (1992) where he also addresses the way fans were

trivialized in larger society: *"Fan communities are characterized as 'audiences' and they are read exclusively in terms of their relationship to a privileged primary text"* (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992: 209). This highlights the tendency of perceiving the fan as a receiver, someone who passively reads the text. This characterized the way fans were perceived and studied up until the 1992 wave of academic work on fandom that shifted the focus from fans as the passive audience, to fandoms as interpretative cultures. Jenkins became one of the most prominent voices in fan studies with his book *Textual Poachers* also from 1992, which became an essential influence on the development of Fan studies, as he situated the fan as an active consumer of media products. In this book, the term "participatory culture" was introduced, which described the social interactions and cultural production within a given fan community.

  Textual Poachers differed from previous fan theories as it celebrated fandom instead of pathologizing it, focusing on fans as an interpretive community which can "poach" or appropriate media texts in order to subvert the intended meaning of the texts, hence, reclaiming ownership of pop-culture from corporate interests. Jenkins asserts that the book can be viewed as a documentation of how a fandom insists on creating meaning from texts which have been deemed worthless or trivial by society (1992: 3). The concept of participatory culture has since evolved, and can now be understood as *"(...) a range of different groups deploying media production and distribution to serve their collective interests"* (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013: 2).

In the book he argues that fandom works as an "alternative social community", he elaborates: *"fandom offers not so much as an escape from reality as an alternative reality whose values may be more humane and democratic than those held by mundane society"* (Jenkins, 1992: 280). In this way, fandom can be understood as a sort of parallel community where fans negotiate the values of the fandom, instead of adopting the values set by societal norms. Jenkins (1992) argues: *"What fandom offers is a community not defined in traditional terms of race, religion, gender, region, politics, or profession, but rather a community of consumers defined through their common relationship with shared texts."* (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992: 213). Hence, the fan community can provide a more democratic space where societal notions of what divides people, notions which seek to isolate the individual, can instead assemble and unite people on the grounds of common interests where untraditional values may dominate. These characteristics is what Jenkins describes as "particularly attractive" to groups of marginalized people or people who are subordinated in dominant culture, such as women, black people, gay people, disabled people and people of lower social class (Jenkins in Lewis 1992, Fiske 1992). The low cost and high accessibility of new media facilitate an

uprising in grassroots media which enable marginalized voices to be heard, hence, reinforcing narratives that challenge the dominant structures and norms embedded in the consciousness of the social psyche of larger society (Jenkins, 2006a). Jenkins asserts that fans exercise a kind of "grassroots cultural politics" which forcefully reflects their investment in the media as well as their own "ideological stakes" (Jenkins, 2006b: 93). He explains that social organization within fandom offers forms of unconditional acceptance while also offering different sources of status which marginalized people do not have in larger society (ibid).

Jenkins further articulate participation culture as follows:

"Fans exchange letters. Fans chat on computer nets. Fans trade tapes so that all interested parties have a chance to see all the available episodes. And, as we will see, fans use their experience of watching television programs as the basis for other types of artistic creation – writing new stories, composing songs, making videos, painting pictures. It is this social and cultural dimension which distinguishes the fannish mode of reception from other viewing styles which depend upon selective and regular media consumption." (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992: 210).

This situates the fan as not merely a consumer, but also a producer who interpret the given text and molds it into different forms of creative products. Jenkins further argues that fan reception does not, and cannot, exist in isolation as it is always shaped through different interpretations from fans (1992: 210). In each case, when fans produce anything from meaning to fan art to alternative identities, they are drawing upon materials from dominant media and altering them in ways that fit their own interest (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992). Jenkins argues that fannish production will inevitably be shaped and molded through the social norms of the fan community, which means that the fan text or product will never offer a pure unmediated insight into the individual fan's personal interpretations. He further argues that this is due to the fact that fannish production is a reflection of the particular expectations of the fan community (1992: 214).

The highly social world of fandom constitutes the ongoing negotiation of the primary text between fans. Jenkins explains:

"(...) fans debate the protocols of reading, the formation of canons, and the ethical dimension of their relationship to primary textual producers almost as much as they discuss the merits and significance of individual program episodes. The meanings generated through

this process certainly reflect, to some degree, the personal interests and experiences of individual fans; one may also locate meanings which originate from the fans' specific position within the larger social formation, meanings which reflect, say, characteristically 'feminine' perspectives on dominant culture." (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992: 211).

Here, Jenkins discusses the different components of fan readings and the process of creating meaning from the primary text. This includes to a certain extent personal and individual experiences, however, Jenkins notes the important role of the individual fan's position within society as a key element in the meaning-making process.

Examining how murderinos make meaning from MFM and negotiate specific gendered discourses will thusly provide an insight into the values of the community. The literature presented in this subchapter thusly offer tools to research the fannish readings and productions within the MFM community.

The following subchapter seeks to elucidate how the convergence and podcasting affect the way people engage with the medium, and how the affordances of podcasting has enabled the creation and success of MFM.

Podcasting and convergence

As aforementioned, much of the research conducted and brought forth in this thesis have studied the fan communities of TV shows and soap operas. Although the theoretical considerations around fan practices brought forth in the previous chapter, may be applicable to the study of murderinos, there are differences to the form of the medium which may alter the way murderinos read and engage in the main text.

Podcasting as a medium is quite accessible in modern society, as editing and recording tools can be downloaded to smartphones and computers. Being strictly audio-centered makes for an easier medium to utilize than an audiovisual production (Sterne, Morris, Baker, & Freire, 2008). Podcasts utilize a delivery system called Really Simple Syndication (RSS) that automatically updates the media libraries of subscribers when a new episode is created. Episodes can be accessed when subscribers please instead of having to tune in at a specific time, and it is easily accessible through the numerous podcast platforms which one can download for free on one's smartphone or computer (Sterne, Morris, Baker, & Freire, 2008; Markman, 2012). Richard Berry (2016) points out in his piece *Podcasting: Considering the evolution of the medium and its association with the word 'radio',* that whenever a new medium is created it is typically evaluated in context to the

familiar (Berry 2016: 7). Berry asserts that radio always has been an intimate medium, but podcasting further that intimacy with its portability across space and time which contributes to a deeper sense of connection (ibid). Podcasts can be created by a radio station by radio professionals, but they can also be created by individuals who have no experience at all, and who may not strive to sound like radio. MFM came to be due to the accessibility and independence of the medium which enabled Karen and Georgia to speak candidly and to create a true crime comedy podcast despite its seemingly obscure genre.

Convergence allows MFM to thrive. This can be seen through the hosts' usage of numerous social media platforms where murderinos can participate. Jenkins (2006a) defines convergence as:

"(...) the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want." (Jenkins, 2006a: 2).

He situates convergence as a circulation of media content across various media systems which relies heavily on the participation of consumers. Although technology plays an important part in convergence (because it offers cheaper and easier access to producing and distributing content), Jenkins argues against it as the primary process and instead asserts that convergence represents a "cultural shift" as consumers are encouraged to search for new information and connect scattered media content (Jenkins, 2006a: 3). However, this consumer-led demand means that the content and quality of the podcasts need to stand for itself in order to gain popularity. Media corporations work towards engaging consumers and reinforcing their commitments, and consumers seek to participate by learning different media technologies in order for them to gain control and interact with other consumers (Jenkins, 2006a).

The interplay between consumers and media corporations is key in Jenkins' account of convergence, but when discussing participatory culture, is it enough to merely talk about its procedures as isolated from the wider structuring conditions of participants' everyday life?

Catherine Driscoll and Melissa Gregg (2011) tackle this very matter in their essay *Convergence Culture and the Legacy of Feminist Cultural Studies.* In the essay they argue that Jenkins' *Convergence Culture* (2006a) offers insight into fan behavior, however, the function of this insight is what Driscoll and Gregg describe as: *" for industrial application rather than the benefit of participants"* (Driscoll & Gregg, 2011: 569). This critique revolves

around Jenkin's depiction of the users as objectified as a "profitable commodity" that can produce different kinds of profit for themselves, while also producing profit for the corporations which own media products (ibid). Driscoll and Gregg argue that Convergence Culture seeks to locate users' expertise on outside interests instead of within the communities, they write: *"The complex integration of community practices in the lives of members, and its meaningfulness as or in relation to anything other than media consumption falls out of the frame"* (Driscoll & Gregg, 2011: 574). Hence, according to Driscoll and Gregg, an in-depth insight into the significance of users' participation and their communities for something else than profitable gain, is absent from Jenkins' account.

In conclusion, what Driscoll and Gregg underline is the need for recognition of the cultural conditions which *"(...) new media technologies inflect but do not determine"* (2011: 578). Hence, by taking the cultural conditions into account will provide a fuller, more in-depth understanding of how new media functions in context to the lived lives of the people who engage with it, and the interconnected role of how culture affects media user participation and vice versa.

In the pursuit of gaining a deeper insight into the MFM community, understanding participatory culture and the role of murderinos as consumers as well as producer offers an insight into the new media landscape and how the community is situated within it. When analyzing murderino fan practices, the goal will not merely be to identify their practices but to further understand these practices in context to potentially resistive discourses within the community.

Analytical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis

The analytical approach of this thesis is rooted in Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). Michelle M. Lazar (2014) asserts that FCDA emerges where feminist studies and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), developed by Norman Fairclough (2013), intersect. In order to properly delve into the functions of FCDA, firstly, a brief clarification of its core tradition CDA, will be introduced. Here, it is relevant to keep in mind the *Discourse* chapter as the following will seek to elucidate the tools which will later facilitate the deconstruction of discourses that express reproduction, negotiation or resistance of hegemonic conceptions of gender and power within the MFM community.

Fairclough asserts that "*language use - any text - is always simultaneously constitutive of (1) social identities, (2) social relations and (3) systems of knowledge and belief* (...)" (Fairclough, 2013: 92).

Therefore any "(...) *text makes its own small contribution to shaping these aspects of society and culture*" (Ibid.) Here, Fairclough describes how a given text expresses a social reality. CDA seeks to create an understanding of how a specific text illustrates the perceived reality by an individual in a specific social context, based on the social institution from which they have been influenced as well as also practicing this influence (Fairclough, 2013). Hence, CDA is an analytical approach which offers the tools to create an understanding of a naturalized ideology within a text (ibid). A purpose of CDA is then to denaturalize the naturalized ideology and disclose how the underlying social structures determine the character of the given discourse (ibid).

Understanding the traditional values of CDA and its aim to identify and denaturalize the institutionalized structures within a text, will provide the foundation for the analytical framework within this thesis. However, the following chapter seeks to uncover a more specific extension of CDA called Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis which will provide more specific analytical tools correlating with the focus on gender of this thesis.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

In order to identify gendered discourses within MFM community through the obtained data, I will conduct a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) which will be executed in *Analysis*. Michelle M. Lazar (2014) describes FCDA as a perspective which aims to examine both the subtle and blatant ways that frequently gendered power asymmetries and assumptions are discoursively created, sustained, mediated and debated, in specific discourse contexts and communities. FCDA seeks to challenge discourses that sustain gendered social arrangements which preserve the unequal treatment of men and women. Lazar argues that CDA offers important analytical tools for the study of the relationship between discourse structures and social practices as it can provide a deeper insight into the various discursive strategies operating to maintain various forms of social inequality (Lazar, 2014). Applying CDA for feminist purposes can potentially produce valuable and insightful analyses, however, Lazar explains that FCDA *"cannot simply be the application of existing CDA frameworks in a cookie-cutter fashion for the study of gender"* (2014, 182). She argues that there is an important difference between employing CDA to study gender and a *feminist* critical discourse analysis. Lazar further explains that studying gender by using CDA suggests that the methods and theories of CDA remain the same, except that the focus of the study happens to be on "gender". FCDA is grounded in the developments in critical feminist theory and practice, while molded by a *"feminist political imagination"* (Bell in Lazar, 2014: 182). Lazar explains that the concept of the "feminist imagination" is based upon Charles Wright Mills' classical concept the "sociological imagination" which seeks to *"translate private troubles into public issues"* (Mills in Lazar, 2014: 182). This means connecting individual experiences and societal relations to each other, which is also the essence of the feminist maxim "the personal is political". The issue of "gender" becomes radical within the feminist political imagination and leans upon feminist theory to carry on its critique of the dominant discourses on gender (Lazar, 2014). Thus, engaging in gender studies, Lazar explains, becomes a political choice. This choice carries implications for the interdisciplinarity of FCDA as it not only inherits its critical incentive via CDA, but also draws upon feminist theory, including postcolonialism and feminist poststructuralism. In broad strokes, postcolonial feminism aims to elucidate how racism and the long-standing cultural, political and economic effects of colonialism still affect women who are non-white and non-western in a postcolonial world (Lewis et al, 2003; Wekker, 2016). Furthermore, postcolonial feminism argues that when using "woman" as a term for a universal group, women are then exclusively defined by their gender, and not by race, sexuality, ethnicity, or

social class (Lewis, 2003).The focus of feminist poststructuralism underlines *"the contingent and discursive nature of all identities"* (Randall, 2010:116). This puts an emphasis on gender as a social construction, meaning that there is no universal category of "man" and "woman", but that these notions are constructed through discourse, not biology (Butler, 1999; Fine, 2010; Beauvoir, 1972).

Thus, the interdisciplinarity of FCDA enables it to not only analyze discursive representations of structural domination, but further analyze *"discursive strategies of negotiation, resistance, solidarity, and social empowerment of disfranchised women"* (Lazar, 2014: 183). This form of analysis remains largely underrepresented within CDA, but exploring these notions may potentially offer deeper and more comprehensive insight into the various aspects of discourse and the feminist intersectionality theories which centers arounds individuals' different identities and the diversity among "women" (and "men") (Lazar, 2014). This type of analysis is particularly pertinent within this thesis as it allows for a more in-depth inquiry of subversion, solidarity, empowerment and negotiation amongst murderinos in the MFM community. It will help uncover certain values and practices within the MFM culture, which, together with the assisting theory will enable a deeper understanding of the negotiation of naturalized gendered ideologies within the fan community. In this way, FCDA enables the analysis to examine the construction and negotiation of murderino identity in context to the interwoven institutions of oppression, instead of treating gender like an isolated notion detached from other forms of structural oppressions (ibid). Lazar further emphasizes the centrality and inevitability of the interdisciplinary aspect of FCDA. It is not merely enough to critique discourses of gender inequality because of the need to acknowledge and analyze the various conditions which enable gender inequality and preserve and strengthen patriarchy.

FCDA focuses on a critical analysis of the discourses that preserve a gendered social order which systematically accords privileges to "men" (people whose gender representation reads as man) and consistently exclude "women" (people whose gender representation reads as woman) (Lazar, 2014). This distinction is important within this thesis in order to grasp what is meant when I use the word "woman".

Feminist critique of gendered social practices seeks to enforce transformation and social emancipation, however, Lazar explains that these are not "once-and-for-all accomplishments", but rather an ongoing striving *"guided by a feminist humanist vision of a just society, in which gender does not predetermine or mediate our relationships with others, and our sense of who we are or might become"* (Grant 199, Collins 1990 in Lazar, 2014: 184). Thus, the aim is to persistently opening up and imagining various ways of "doing" and

"becoming" which are socially inclusive and considerate of all people, instead of in strictly defined boxes.

To better understand and confront the continuous struggle against patriarchal systems of discrimination and thought, bell hooks offers an approach she describes as *"an openness of conviction, a 'radical openness,' in voicing critique and in forming communities of resistance"* (hooks in Lazar, 2014: 184). Lazar argues that FCDA offers this openness and critique, hence asserting that feminist discourse scholars, by engaging in this type of critique, are establishing communities of activism and resistance.

Lazar further argues: *"To speak from the position of a 'woman' then is not the same as speaking from the political perspective of a feminist subject"* (2014: 184). This means that to know as a "woman" is to know from the ideological viewpoint of gender, which can critically be explained as *"sociocognitive representations of practices in the service of power"* (Fairclough in Lazar, 2014: 186), meaning the established and naturalized system of ideas and ideals of society, in which the dominating definition of what it entails to be a woman, is rooted. Studying how murderinos negotiate the MFM values within their subculture can potentially provide an insight into their lived experiences within larger society where women are still marginalized, compared to the MFM community where women make up the vast majority.

A feminist subject is defined by Lazar as someone who has a "doubled vision" which means that *"she is both inside and outside the ideology of gender"* (2014: 185). This defines the feminist subject as someone who is conscious of the two-sided pull that enables her to attain a critical distance not only on gender, but also herself (Lauretis 1987, Grant 1993 in Lazar, 2014).

Lazar explains that, among feminists, a theory/practice dichotomy exists in which "theory" is viewed as connected to academic feminists, whereas "practice" is associated with feminist activists. Lazar, however, proposes that critical academic feminists can instead be viewed as "academic activism". She argues that theory and analyses of gendered discourse practices are, through FCDA, raising crucial awareness through teaching and research, and that raising awareness is in itself a type of activism. Raising critical awareness is, according to Lazar, an action which enables people to view things differently that are not merely in regards to other people's situations, but also one's own beliefs, dispositions and attitudes.

Thus, the FCDA method will provide the tools to conduct an in-depth analysis of the discourses among My Favorite Murder fans, as well as the hosts, to gain an understanding of their personal reality through a critical feminist lens with the aim to uncover deeper gendered socio-political conditions expressed in the discourses. Thus, FCDA offers

analytical tools in order to creating an understanding of the relationship between discursive structures and social practices within the MFM community. This will enable the uncovering of discursive strategies which seek to uphold or dismantle various forms of social inequality within the fandom.

Frame Analysis

In order to create an understanding of *My Favorite Murder*'s fanbase, and their negotiation of values, it is relevant to look into the narrative which Karen and Georgia have established on the podcast. The premise of the podcast is to tell the true stories of specific murders while the hosts provide their own personal narrative in form of jokes, comments and analysis. Here, the theory of framing comes into play.

Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman explains in his book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974) how communicators (consciously or unconsciously) formulate a point of view which frames facts of given situations in a manner which enhances a particular agenda or understanding of those facts. Essentially, framing is the way something is presented to the audience and how this presentation influences how the audience process the information given to them.

Goffman speaks of two primary frameworks: *natural* and *social*. Primary framework is based upon the most basic and general level of understanding which enables one to *"locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms"* (Goffman 1974, 21). This suggests that primary frameworks organize events through regulating the meaning making of a given situation, thus building on the conjecture that various frameworks generate different designs of interpretation. The labeling of these frameworks as "primary" therefore suggests that they provide the initial scheme of interpretation, meaning that nothing precedes them.

Goffman explains that natural framework describes occurrences which are "purely physical", meaning that there are no actors influencing or causing these occurrences. This type of framework is often encountered in the biological and physical sciences, such as the weather which is mere facts of the natural world free from human influence (Goffman, 1974).

Social frameworks, however, provide understandings and explanations behind events *"that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency"* (Goffman, 1974: 22). Again, this can be demonstrated through Goffman's example of the weather, where information about the weather is now being presented by a meteorologist,

thus introducing a live agency which is susceptible to factors such as flatter and threat. The information then becomes communicated through rhetoric that positions the information within a frame which encourages particular interpretations and discourages others.

Goffman argues that frames function as a set of theoretical perspectives and concepts which work to organize a person's experiences and guide the person's actions. Investigating everyday interactions can therefore provide an insight into how ritualized and structural mechanisms influence even the smallest encounters throughout one's life. Framing theory aims to deconstruct identity, hence encourage reflection on language and actions and their interdependency which plays a fundamental role in the construction of reality.

A framing analysis of My Favorite Murder will provide insight into the personal values and beliefs of the hosts which frame the information about the murders of which they speak, and how their experiences creates a filter through which they make sense of the world. This frame which encapsulates the communication and rhetoric of the podcast plays an essential role when trying to gain an understanding of the online murderino spaces and the values and perceptions on which they are established. Therefore, Goffman's framing analysis provides a tool to study and reflect upon constructions of social reality, hence establishing the conditions for an in-depth analysis of how the podcast frames the conditions and values that murderinos negotiate within the community.

The combination of FCDA and framing analysis in this thesis, is chosen because of its potential of uncovering a deeper understanding of the gendered discourses on MFM and what perceived reality lies beneath. Lasse Lindekilde argues in his chapter *Discourse and Frame Analysis* in the book *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* (2014) that discourse analysis and frame analysis are closely related as they both offer interpretive perspectives on social interactions, he asserts: *"(...) the combined interest of discourse and frame analysis is the discursive battles over meaning and definition of reality"* (Lindekilde, 2014: 3). As Lindekilde asserts, there is a shared interest in the construction of reality between discourse analysis and frame theory, however, where discourse analysis examines how discourses express socially constructed notions of reality, framing analysis seek to uncover how the text is situated within the framework of certain values and ideologies (Lindekilde, 2014).

The following chapter consists of the FCDA/framing analysis of *My Favorite Murder*, which will aim to uncover Karen and Georgia's discursive construction of gendered notions and values. Examining their framing of gendered discourses will create an understanding of perceived reality and experiences that particular gendered discourses on the podcast are

constructed upon. This will further provide an insight into the foundation of particular gendered values of MFM, hence making it possible to finally analyze how the MFM community negotiate these values in their community-building, and potentially creating resistive discursive practices.

MFM Analysis

This analytical chapter consists of a frame analysis of *MFM* which will provide insight into how Karen and Georgia frame discourses of power and gender on the podcast. The purpose of conducting a framing analysis of MFM is to uncover the way gender is discursively constructed by the hosts (Goffman, 1974). This is relevant in order to better understand how murderinos create and negotiate meaning within the community which will be the subject of further analysis in *Community Analysis.* Moreover, FCDA will also be applied as analytical framework due to its roots in the search to uncover how realities are constructed. Combining the two analytical approaches in this context will enable a more in-depth examination of how the hosts create meaning potentials for the listeners to decode. FCDA will help uncover the representation of power and gender in their social construction of reality. This construction of reality makes the foundation of values and interpretations from which Karen and Georgia frame different topics and experiences. Relevant findings in the collected data will be drawn upon with the aim of uncovering how murderinos receive the hosts' framing of specific topics such as vigilance.

Theories brought forth in *Theoretical Framework* will be applied within the analysis in order to gain a deeper understanding of the podcast and how the hosts discursively frame hegemonic notions of femininity and power.

The following chapter will consist of certain discursive categories within My Favorite Murder which are chosen from their high significance as identified through the online community. The categories will be divided into subchapters, each focusing on aspects specifically relevant to subsequently examining how the murderino community negotiate gendered notions and potentially resist said notions.

The categories are:

- Vigilance
- Framing rape culture
- Laughter as resistance
- Coming to terms with true crime fandom

Each sub-chapter seek to uncover how gender is expressed through the hosts' discourses. These will be deconstructed with the purpose of subsequently examining how the MFM community draw upon and negotiate these themes amongst themselves and what

this means for their community building in terms of providing a resistive space. Relevant findings in the online survey will be presented in relevant contexts in order to create an understanding of how murderinos are affected by the hosts' framing.

From the very beginning of MFM, Karen and Georgia have been open about their personal struggles with addiction, eating disorder, anxiety, and various mental health issues. MFM is continuously referred to as "a safe space" by the hosts, where listeners can consume true crime free from the taboos and judgment normally connected to the genre (episode 1 - My Firstest Murder).

The personal experiences which make up the reasoning behind the hosts' anxieties and constant awareness of danger, become evident when listening to episodes. In her dissertation on MFM and the true crime genre, Sara Sacks (2017) concisely presents numerous of the hosts' personal experiences brought forth on the podcast which elucidate some of the trauma that shapes their perceived realities and guides the way they frame these realities:

"(...) in Episode 1 [Georgia] mentions the time she thinks she let a child molester into her house when she was too young to know any better(Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016). In Episode 5 Karen speaks about the time she watched a man robbing her house while she and her sister were supposed to be alone inside of it (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016). Terrified for her past self in Episode 45 Georgia reveals the time she followed a stranger to his apartment to do a solo "photo shoot" when she was eighteen (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016). In episode 68 Karen tells a story about the time when she was drunk at a bar and an unknown man attempted to forcibly remove her from the vicinity before one of her male friends could intervene (Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2017)." (Sacks, 2017: 94).

These are merely a few of the personal experiences which are brought forth on the podcast, but they offer an insight into the lived experiences of Karen and Georgia, and how their worldviews have been constructed based on experiences such as these. Hence, it can provide an understanding of how, and why, Karen and Georgia often express a distrust towards men while discussing the stories which they bring forth on the podcast. What the experiences above have in common are male subjects who have made the hosts fear for their safety, resulting in future anxiety and caution. This is relevant for the following analytical chapter which delves into excerpts from MFM which express how the hosts frame and communicate their personal experiences with trauma to their listeners.

Vigilance

One of the most prominent themes on the podcast is vigilance. Vigilance encapsulates the alertness and caution many women perform in order to stay safe. As MFM is a true crime podcast, the hosts often talk about what one could and should do as a woman to be vigilant. This section highlights how Karen and Georgia discuss gender as inherently intertwined in their account of navigating anxiety and vigilance.

The hosts describe the act of constant vigilance with words such as "healthy", "a good thing" and what one is "supposed to do", thereby expressing their own realities in which an impending threat is ever-present, while also framing alertness as necessary for women to survive[9].

The hosts believe they have a responsibility to teach women vigilance because larger society does not. By taking on a responsibility of teaching women vigilance, the hosts resist the hegemonic notion of femininity which teaches women to be polite and nurturing, and apply their own narrative which encourages women to be alert, vigilant and follow their gut feeling (Brown, 1994). However, survey results suggest that murderinos are not only practicing vigilance for their own safety as 57 percent said that MFM had made them more protective/aware of women's safety.[10] This suggests that many murderinos develop an automatic protectiveness towards other women. One survey respondent wrote:

"It has given me a sense of belonging even though it is as community of strangers. And I used to feel like I disliked 95% of women, but that number has decreased. I think, maybe we could be friends, I wonder if they like MFM"

This illustrates how the hosts' discourse can encourage listeners to rework hegemonic notions, including dismantling internalized misogyny (hatred/mistrust/dislike of women practiced by women) which is a consequence of patriarchal society that systematically devalues women (Flood, 2007: 143).

The way murderinos negotiate vigilance amongst themselves will be further elucidated in *MFM Community Analysis.*

The hosts often discuss their anxieties and fears of victimization in direct context to their sex:

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[9]For examples see Appendix 2 - I
[10] See Appendix 1

G: You know what sucks about being a woman is you never know like if something is nothing or not, you know?

K: Yeah that's right

G: Like you might see this guy pacing and you never see him again, or you might go in your house and he is standing in your living room.

K: That's right.

G: Like what is nothing? Or like a boyfriend is stalking you, or a dude is stalking you. Is it nothing or is this guy gonna murder me?

K: You just don't know.

G: I mean not that stalking isn't awful too but like- is he just like obsessed for the next couple of weeks until he finds someone else or is he a murderer?

(Kilgariff & Hardstark, 2016, Episode 2)

By consistently saying "you" instead of "I" in Georgia's account of her experiences with feeling unsafe and anxious, Georgia creates a distance between herself and the negative experiences of which she speaks. Furthermore, her formulation signifies that "you" can be understood as "women", hence framing her own experiences as relatable to other women. In this way she discursively connects women through the everyday experiences of attempting to navigate potential threats, thusly creating a commonality between the female listeners.

The framing of women as "never knowing if something is nothing or not" frames anxiety and paranoia as an intrinsic aspect of women's vulnerable social status in dominant culture. Hence, Georgia indirectly describes insidious trauma which often result in paranoia and anxiety as an effect of the "everyday and ongoing" marginalization and sexualization of women (Muzak, 2009: 28). Survey respondents were asked why they listen to MFM, to which a list of statements were available for them to express their level of agreement from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". One of the statement was "It has a healing/calming effect on my trauma/anxiety" to which 34 percent of 998 respondents answered "I agree" and 14 percent answered "I strongly agree". This data suggests that many women who listen to MFM find that it helps them cope with trauma/anxiety.

One of the most popular MFM catchphrases is "Fuck Politeness" which overtly rejects the hegemonic notion of female politeness. The phrase has been used several times on the podcast. "Fuck Politeness" can be perceived as the epitome of MFM's vigilance discourse as it urges women to abandon the patriarchal notion and requirement of them to be kind and polite, especially in situations where their instincts tell them to escape the situation. This

sentiment is pervasive throughout the collected survey data in regards to what murderinos have taken away from MFM. In the survey one woman said about MFM:

"It's helped me say 'fuck politeness'. I spent far too long putting myself in difficult and sometimes dangerous situations to avoid being rude" [11].

Another murderino wrote: *"It has helped me notice when I'm disregarding my safety for the sake of politeness".* These comments demonstrate that MFM helps listeners identify when they are disregarding their own safety for a man that makes them feel unsafe. 66,37 percent of the respondents said that MFM has helped them trust their gut feeling in potentially dangerous situations, which suggests that because Karen and Georgia frame vigilance as healthy and necessary it can encourage female listeners to prioritize their own safety over hegemonic expectations of their sex. In this sense. Similarly, the phrase "Pepper-spray first, apologize later" further support MFM's message to women to trust their gut feeling and react if they feel their safety is compromised. It signifies that it is better to be wrong and alive than being right and dead.

In summary, Karen and Georgia consistently emphasize the importance and necessity for women to be vigilant, and further frame it as healthy to practice in order to avoid victimization. The podcast becomes more than a site of therapy for the hosts, it also becomes a source where the hosts can inform listeners of how to practice vigilance through different techniques and learn from the many fatal "mistakes" of the victims in their stories. The framing of vigilance as key, and the recurring phrase "Fuck Politeness" tells the listener that they have the right to say no and to run away, something that many murderinos have absorbed as seen in the presented data. "Insidious trauma" offers a contextualization of the hosts' anxiety and vigilance, which can be understood as the effect of the subordination of women in dominant culture which subvertly traumatizes women over time and causes responses such as anxiety and paranoia (Muzak, 2009). Moreover, when listening to the podcast, one can hear a pattern in the hosts' dialogues that frames the presence of strange men as a reason for fear and unease, and the presence of women as automatically providing a sense of security.

The following chapter will explore how the hosts discuss issues of rape culture on podcast, and how their framing of this issue can be understood in context to hegemonic notions of femininity.

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[11] See Appendix 1

Framing rape culture

Feminist theorists argue that true crime narratives, that often focus on rape and murder of women, are preserving and celebrating misogyny (Caputi, 1987). This section seeks to elucidate how rape culture is framed on MFM, and which discursive contradictions can be identified in the main text.

In episode 20 the hosts discuss ingrained sexism within the justice system, particularly as enforced by judge Persky of the Brock Turner case that went viral after Turner was sentenced to merely six months in jail (of which he served three months) after raping an unconscious 22-year-old woman. The following is an excerpt of the hosts discussing another case judge Persky had presided over regarding a woman who was gang-raped. Georgia explains that photos of the victim at a party she attended over a year after the rape had occurred, was used against her in court.

K: I'm sorry… so what?

G: Yeah!

K: So what?

G: They said that the photos are in direct contradiction, quote 'of the plaintiff's claims that she is socially isolated and socially reticent.

(...)

G: But that doesn't- and especially, not especially, but photos post-rape? She's fuckin- it doesn't matter what she does!

K: She could be spiraling out of control, she could be anything, who the fuck knows?

G: Or she could be a slut, it doesn't fucking matter!

(Episode 20)

The hosts call out institutionalized rape culture as well as the American justice system. By discussing rape and continuously emphasizing how the victim does not bear any responsibility in her victimization, the hosts frame rape as solely being the fault of the rapist, hence opposing the discourse enforced by judge Persky which frames the behavior/attire of the victim as negating her case. The case they bring forth illustrates the institutionalized notion of women being blamed for the violence forced upon them. By continuously asserting "it doesn't matter" in regards to the victim's appearance and sexual history, the hosts' framing of rape discourse opposes structural sexism which seeks to frame women as accomplices in their own victimization, as demonstrated by the justice system.

In the survey, 55 percent of the respondents said that MFM had made them more aware of the discrimination within the criminal justice system. This suggests that the hosts' framing of the American justice system often elucidate discrimination and thereby frame the stories they tell in a way that exposes injustice, instead of concealing it (Spohn & Tellis, 2012).

However, if one looks at the MFM sign-off catchphrase "Stay Sexy and Don't Get Murdered" (SSDGM) one can understand the phrase as a way of putting onus on women as it tells women to "not get murdered", hence reproducing the hegemonic notion that it is in fact up to women themselves to not be assaulted. Murderinos' negotiation of the meaning of this catchphrase will be shown in *Discussion*.

The next subchapter aims to uncover how Karen and Georgia's comedy is potentially subversive through discursively situating patriarchal subjects as the of their jokes, hence threatening dominant notions of power (Brown, 1994).

Laughter as resistance

The hosts' comedy is essential to their product and can be considered to be one of MFM's biggest values. Almost 98 percent of the survey respondents said they listen to MFM because of the hosts' sense of humor. This chapter will focus on how Karen and Georgia produce carnivalesque laughter, and its potential to further resistive discourse.

A recurring theme on the podcast is the hosts' use of humor that criticizes hegemonic notions of gender[12]. Karen and Georgia transfer this kind of humor over to their dialogues about murderers (Sacks, 2017). This can be seen in the way the hosts mocks male killers, by ridiculing displays of hegemonic, fragile and toxic masculinity, which the popular catchphrase "Toxic Masculinity Ruins the Party Again" encapsulates. [13] Joking about the murderers emasculates them and thereby reduce them as a threat. In this sense, the hosts mock a violent patriarchal culture, and thereby using carnivalesque laughter to claim their power (Sacks, 2017; Brown 1994).

The following is an excerpt of the hosts talking about killer Ronnie Garner's relationship:

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[12] For example see Appendix 2
[13] For example see Appendix 2 - III

G: They fall in love. Debra describes Ronnie as "Very caring. He never put me through- he never put me in the rough situations he was in throughout his life. He sheltered me from that stuff."

K: I feel like we gotta get our standards a little higher [Georgia and audience laugh]. "He doesn't punch me in the face"

G: Yeah… "he doesn't take me along with his burglarising, he keeps me out of that"

K: "He's never made me sleep in a hobo-camp [audience laugh] and because of that I love him so" [audience laugh]

(Episode 113)

This excerpt illustrates how carnivalesque laughter is used on MFM as a bonding strategy. By saying "*we* gotta get our standards a little higher", Karen discursively connects the female listeners and audience, by using self-deprecatory comedy which emphasizes the commonality amongst women, in this case that women expect too little of their male romantic partners (Kotthoff, 2006; Mintz, 1985).

Karen and Georgia's use of carnivalesque laughter seeks to resist the hegemonic notions of power, hence discursively flipping the traditional use of humor which situates the woman as the subject of the joke (Brown, 1994). This can function as a unifier between the female majority of murderinos that connects women through humoristically presented commonalities. By mixing true crime and comedy, the hosts create a space where the patriarchal subjects of true crime become the subject of their comedy. In this way, the fear that is tied up in the threat of victimization (as demonstrated in the previous chapter) is processed through comedy, thus creating a space where the hosts can acknowledge their subordination in the form of joking and thereby claim their power (Brown, 1994).

In *Community Analysis*, I will examine how instances of carnivalesque laughter is produced and negotiated amongst murderinos, thus uncovering if and how the MFM value of carnivalesque laughter transcends from the podcast to the community, which will create foundation for a discussion on what this means for the community as a potential space of resistive practice.

Coming to terms with true crime fandom

This subchapter seeks to uncover how the hosts make sense of their true crime fandom. It will further elucidate how the hosts participate in the discursive construction of the murderino identity and how they align themselves with their listeners.

Due to convergence culture the hosts can easily engage with their listeners and co-produce knowledge (Jenkins,2006; Sacks, 2017). By talking about taboos, such as mental illness, the hosts encourage an intimacy that strengthen the community's bonds. This can further be seen in their discussions regarding their shared marginalization in being female true crime fans. In episode 1, the hosts discuss dealing with their stigmatized interest:

K: I just thought I was so weird and perverted my whole life for loving this topic so much.
G: And you can't tell anyone because they're going to think you're psychotic or like into murder, which you're not, you're just like fascinated
K: By the idea- the whole concept.

In episode 5, the hosts frame true crime fandom as intrinsically linked to gender:

G: Yeah. I think most women like to talk about murder.
K: Yeah.
G: Yeah. And some dudes.
K: Some dudes, too
(Hardstark & Kilgariff, 2016).

This excerpts above illustrate how the concept of violence as being inherently tied to men, in larger society, alienates women from taking part in violence or finding pleasure in violent media (Browder, 2006; Vicary & Fraley, 2010). By saying that "some dudes" are also interested in true crime, illustrates how the hosts gender their fanbase as women throughout the podcast. The survey showed that almost 8 percent of respondents identify as male which correlates with the hosts' imagined audience.

As mentioned in Theoretical Framework, true crime, as opposed to stories of war, is a female gendered form of violent media and thusly is trivialized (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). This means that the largely female fandom revolving around true crime can be understood in itself as resisting hegemonic notions of femininity that seek to suppress women's interest in the topic. The hosts often read and discuss emails from fans, who often express how their

interest in murder also resulted in alienation[14]. In this sense, Karen and Georgia build a bond with their listeners through a shared experience of being restricted from partaking in discourse about violence and murder which resulted in feelings of shame and even insanity. This was echoed in the survey, where murderinos were asked to check off the boxes that describe why they listen to MFM, 41 percent of murderinos "agreed" with the statement "It makes me feel understood/accepted in ways I do not feel understood/accepted in everyday life", and 20 percent said they "strongly agreed". This suggests that a majority of murderinos are feeling a form of validation from listening to MFM, that they do not receive in their everyday life.

The hosts continuously depict themselves and their fanbase as outsiders whose niche interest automatically separates them from mainstream culture. The community then becomes a cultural site in which murderinos can openly celebrate, share and practice their secret knowledge of true crime and murder. Hence, the hosts discursively construct an in-group knowledge and encourage intimacy and bonding through discussions of a shared experience of stigmatization.

Summing up the MFM analysis, the findings brought forth in this framing/FCDA analysis of MFM illustrates how Karen and Georgia's framing of vigilance as healthy conveys to their audience that trusting their gut, hence abandoning internalized notions of female politeness, is essential for women's safety. The hosts, as well as a big part of their female listeners, express that "Fuck Politeness" has enabled them to prioritize themselves instead of succumbing to dominant culture's discourse of female politeness as imperative for hegemonic femininity.

The hosts' candor regarding their personal mental health struggles resonates with murderinos, and the hosts encourage them to overcome their anxiety by going to live-shows. The hosts frame the MFM community as a place of solidarity and understanding, where many fans struggle with anxiety, but love true crime, and therefore one can feel automatically connected to fellow murderinos.

Karen and Georgia clearly state their resistance against rape culture and frame the victim as never culpable in her/his own rape. However, "SSDGM" and the hosts' focus on women to be their own savior if they are attacked, can be interpreted as placing some culpability on the victim. *Discussion* will highlight a negotiation amongst murderinos of the

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[14] For example see Appendix 2

phrase "SSDGM" and how it ought and ought not to be used in- and outside of the fan community.

Through humor, the hosts often mock the murderer of the stories, who can be understood as representing patriarchy in the sense that they often rape and kill women. These can be seen as the embodiments of the hosts' (and many other anxious women's) anxiety of becoming victimized, thus the act of mocking these (predominantly male) murderers becomes an act of defiance against patriarchy and thusly creates an inversion of power, which according to Brown (1994) is a threat to dominant institutions. The comedic aspect of MFM is an important value, therefore the Community Analysis will contain an analysis of if/how murderinos produce carnivalesque laughter and what this means for a potential subversion/resistance of hegemonic femininity within the MFM community.

MFM community analysis

This chapter will analyze the MFM community with a point of departure in the literature introduced in the theoretical framework. More specifically the chapter seeks to uncover how the framing of specific gendered discourses on MFM, as illustrated in the previous chapter, are visible in the community, and how murderinos understand and negotiate such discourses. This will provide insight into how the MFM fandom can function as a cultural site within which women can rework hegemonic notions and articulate a resistance against patriarchy. This will be analyzed through FCDA which will enable a deeper look into how gendered power asymmetries are discursively negotiated amongst murderinos.
The subchapters are:

- Balancing empathy and murder
- The reactive pleasure of sharing experiences
- Humor in the MFM community
- A murderino production

The following section seeks to elucidate how the community can function as a place for coping with trauma. This is not the reality for all murderinos, as there are many different reasons for being a fan of the podcast. However, Browder's (2006) claim that many female true crime fans find themselves engaged in the genre as a way of coping with their trauma or fear of being attacked, was echoed in the collected data, which will be presented.

Balancing empathy and murder - Negotiation of MFM values

As aforementioned, the genre of true crime has a reputation of distastefully taking advantage of tragedy (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). This chapter will examine how murderinos negotiate what true crime fan-behavior is acceptable and what is not. The meanings generated through this debate will reflect, to some extent, the experiences of individual murderinos (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992). This may further an understanding of how values that reflect gendered notions are negotiated and practiced within the community.

Karen and Georgia have consistently argued on MFM that the aim of the podcast is not to cheer for murder (as the title of the podcast may signify). In episode 134 - Live at the Connor Palace in Cleveland, Karen explains: *"We are all here to talk about tragedy within a gazebo of comedy, let's say it that way. The tragedy is not funny, but we have a great time in this gazebo around it."*. This sentiment is repeated in different variations throughout the podcast, to clarify that the victims are never the butt of the joke, which further emphasizes the sensitive nature of the subject.

The following focuses on communication within the MFM Facebook group which expresses a negotiation between murderinos in regards to balancing their fandom and sensitivity towards victims' families. Uncovering a particular Facebook-thread will provide insight into how murderinos negotiate "proper" behavior within the community.

The post in the Facebook group reads as follows:

"I'm a huge MFM fan, I'm a murderino, I'm all for the catch phrase SSDGM.

I'm not okay with people spamming live coverage of rape/murder cases with SSDGM. I feel like it's poor showing of solidarity to the victims and their families.

When the upset of this can be seen why are there those among us continuing this? Why are they not practicing empathy for families and victims?

I feel there are better ways to show your solidarity that aren't going to upset people that aren't fans of the podcast. That don't understand it's a show of solidarity not mockery.

I think more empathy needs to be practiced among us for those who have been upset by the SSDGM spamming of live news coverage."

(Rhiannon, May 2018).

The post received over 2400 likes and 263 comments, in which many murderinos voiced their opinion on the matter. The post was posted in the wake of the arrest of notorious serial-killer and serial-rapist the Golden State Killer (GSK), and several murderinos had noticed comments with MFM references, specifically "stay sexy and don't get murdered" (SSDGM), on a social media live-streaming of the recent arrest.

One woman wrote: *"I'm pretty sure K & G even mentioned that they're not cool with stuff like this once"* (Elizabeth, May 2018), which received 73 likes. This comment argues that this kind of behavior is not accepted due to the hosts' expressed disapproval of such behavior, hence murderinos should obey these values. It further illustrates how, although the community is technically a fan-run forum, behavioral norms within the community are rooted

in values expressed and practiced by the hosts on MFM and discursively upheld by murderinos. This illustrates how values and rules within the community are often connected to the expressed values of the hosts. The vast majority of comments rejected the SSDGM-spamming and expressed a call for murderinos to keep such fan practices within the community. One woman commented:

"People were literally dogpiling and attacking anybody who said it wasn't nice to post that on the live feed. It was sick! Victims families absolutely DO NOT need us nobodies telling them to stay sexy and don't get murdered like their goddamn relatives or neighbors or whoever. Like I get it… but celebrate in here, with your people. Not on the live feed, spamming the world and where victims and victims families can see that shit. So EMBARRASSING!!!!!" (Desiree, May 2018).

This brings attention to the matter of context when practicing fannish behavior outside of the murderino sphere. The comment received 61 likes, signifying that many murderinos agree that they need to be considerate of when and where they reference the podcast, specifically when to say/write SSDGM. This discursively situates the MFM fandom as a fandom which must be practiced with sensitivity due to the emotional nature of its theme. Calling for murderinos to "celebrate it in here, with your people" signifies an understanding of the MFM community as the designated space for fannish behavior that has a risk of taking on a different meaning when expressed outside of the MFM community, especially in direct context to actual murder cases. The word "embarrassing" as Desiree describes it, was prominent in several comments in the thread, which indicates that when murderinos "misbehave", other murderinos feel that this behavior reflects back on them and gives the fandom a bad name.

As illustrated above, when murderinos write comments which agree with previous comments, they demonstrate similar attitudes and respect. Thus, the comments of agreement facilitate the friendliness of the group which MFM and murderinos pride themselves of as elucidated in *Contextualization* (Baym, 1998).

Another murderino wrote:

"Being fans of true crime doesn't mean we're fans of the CRIME itself and sometimes that can be misconstrued… actions like this lend to the confusion."
(Leah, May 2018)

This comment articulates the inherent conflict in being a fan of true crime, as it is often misunderstood by outsiders. Thusly, when a murderino acts in a way that furthers the"confusion", she/he strengthen the perception of true crime as distasteful exploitation, and true crime fans as apathetic. It further illustrates an acknowledgment of the murderino identity as potentially problematic when it is performed outside of the community. This sentiment, as well as Desiree writing " *celebrate in here, with your people"* demonstrates the "us and them" mentality that murderinos share with the hosts. In this sense, the murderino identity is built on a shared feeling of stigmatization by larger society. Thusly, the murderino identity is continuously depicted as the outsider within mainstream culture, which strengthen the in-group solidarity and community-building amongst murderinos.

Where many of the comments called for empathy and situational awareness from fellow murderinos, some viewed this as an expression of hypersensitivity:

"Trigger warning… stop being so sensitive. This is a podcast about murder, okay? If SSDGM offends you, how on earth do you manage to listen to a podcast about murder? I highly doubt the people who said SSDGM on those feeds were mocking the victims. Stop trying to control everyone. This group is getting beyond ridiculous. Might I suggest creating a group called Sensirinos so you all have a safe space to cry about the littlest things that offend you?"

- Laura (May, 2018)

This comment received 2 hearts, 2 likes and 3 'angry faces' which indicates that there are murderinos agreeing with the claim of hypersensitivity in the group but may choose to not comment due to the vast majority of comments condemning careless use of SSDGM. This murderino connotes an interest in murder with an automatic insensitivity due to its morbid nature, and further expresses a disconnect to the group due to the alleged hypersensitivity.

Laura's suggestion for the "sensitive" murderinos to start a separate group to make a safe space, suggests her view that the Facebook group is not, nor should it be, a space to discuss murderino etiquette. One can view this disagreement as two separate perceptions of what the MFM community is and should be. As mentioned in *Community,* not all MFM fans necessarily view the MFM fandom as a community, as Laura's comment suggests. Following the notion of Gemeinschaft, a community is *"characterized by affiliations around a group identity that includes shared customs, folkways, and social mores"* (Tönnies in Pearce, 2009:5). Thusly, the Facebook thread can be understood as a negotiation of the murderino group identity, specifically what social mores' should be shared amongst them. Many

murderinos appear to agree on a higher sensitivity level, some murderinos disagree with the idea of behavioral norms within the fandom.

The MFM Facebook community guidelines' first rule is *"Be kind and courteous"*, which is elaborated as *"We're all in this together to create a welcoming environment. Let's treat everyone with respect. Healthy debates are natural, but kindness is required. Take care especially to respect the victims."* As this rule emphasizes, it is important to respect each other, however, it is not further detailed how this is to be accomplished. Moreover, it is difficult to create an idea of how pervasive disrespectful comments are within the facebook group, due to group moderators swiftly erasing comments which they themselves deem to violate group rules[15]. Because of moderators deleting comments, and sometimes even group members (as when women of color criticized MFM for racism) , they can potentially create an *illusion* of a positive and respectful fan environment.

The fact that the majority of the murderinos' comments calls for empathy expresses a prevalent wish for the community to be rooted in values that differ from the hegemonic masculinity of larger society which seeks to undermine the traditionally "feminine" emotional talk (Brown, 1994). The prevalent understanding amongst murderinos that murderinos should be empathetic and sensitive in the encounter with non-murderinos especially in the context of tragedy, suggests a shared set of social meanings that create the conditions for many murderinos to imagine themselves as a community and as a group whose reputation depends on the sensitivity of murderinos within dominant culture (Baym, 1998). The fact that allegations of political correctness and hypersensitivity exist within the MFM community, but are outnumbered by requests for empathy, shows that discourses of dominant culture are prevalent in the MFM community, however, the power distribution differs. In this way, the MFM community can be understood as a parallel community where murderinos negotiate community values instead of adopting the values of dominant culture (Jenkins, 1992).

The reactive pleasure of sharing experiences

This subchapter seeks to illuminate a particular subreddit thread in which murderinos share and discuss their anxieties and vigilance. More specifically, I aim to uncover how murderinos talk about their vigilance and what gendered notions are revealed through such

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[15] See Appendix 3 for overview of MFM Facebook group rules

negotiation. This will elucidate how power and gender are discursively mediated within the thread and thusly how murderino talk reveals reactive pleasure.

In January 2017 a murderino wrote a post on the MFM subreddit with the title: *"You just prevented a car jacking tonight. Thank you."*. The woman describes how two men slid into her car when she got back into her car after shopping. One of the men put his hand on her throat and told her to be quiet.

"The only thing going through my head was Fuck Politeness and Don't let them take you to a second location. I screamed. Kept screaming. Get out. Get out. Flailed my arms. Tried to get my legs up to kick. Get out."

Here, she describes how Karen and Georgia's words on how to get out of a threatening situation influenced her to act in the moment. This illustrates how the hosts' advice turned catchphrases can help listeners prepare themselves for danger. The woman's vigilance worked, and the men fled from the car.

The comment received 25 comments consisting of encouragement, praise of her vigilance, and comments on different ways to stay vigilant. One murderinos wrote:

"I'm still always creeped out that someone could come right up behind me and open my door before I put it in drive (where it then locks automatically). I'm extra extra paranoid lol" (KaukalaikikiTeine).

The original poster (OP) answered:

"Well, not to be a party pooper, but...the fact that we are discussing this means you're not super paranoid. You're rightly aware of something that happens. What's the saying about just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you. Feeling vulnerable in public sucks. It sucks that it's part of being a woman."

The word "paranoid" is often used by murderinos, as well as the hosts, to describe their hypervigilance. This shows how the MFM community can be utilized as a space for

women to share their personal experiences and anxieties through the subject of true crime. 'KaukalaikikiTeine' description of herself as "paranoid" illustrates how she uses a word that, in larger society, is used to uphold a discourse which preserves the dominant notion that women's vigilance is "paranoia". OP reasures *KaukalaikikiTeine* that her "paranoia" is valid, which she links to being vulnerable as a woman in larger society.

These comments illustrate a pattern of confirming and validating each other's vigilance within the online MFM groups. According to Brown (1994), this can be understood as an example of how women as a silenced majority take pleasure in talking with other women, and how female murderinos find pleasure in hearing other women articulate their experiences and feelings (Brown, 1994:18). By discursively connection paranoia and womanhood, OP indirectly alludes to insidious trauma which is linked to women's vulnerable position in dominant culture. The exchange illustrates how the MFM community can function as an "in-between-stage" where one is neither in nor outside social structures (Brown, 1994: 150). Moreover, it shows how the MFM community allows for murderinos' reworking of dominant gendered notions (such as "paranoia") and thereby internalized ideologies can be broken through (ibid).

After several supportive comments from other murderinos, OP writes:

"Thank you ALL for your support. I feel like no one in real life understands what I'm feeling. The numbness, the disassociation, the desire to just sleep, and fear as they go it turns. Why the fact that he had his hands on my throat fucks me up the worst.
I also want to point out I'm not a pretty young little girl. I'm a middle aged, overweight, overtired MOM. Fucks sake, they had to slide my kid's booster seat aside to get in. It has NOTHING to do with what you look like, what you wore, etc. Questioning what you did or didn't do is a waste of energy."

This comment shows how OP gain something from the MFM community which she does not have "in real life". This suggests that like the podcast, the community also offers murderinos a level of understanding which people outside of the fandom are not capable of.

This further emphasizes a feeling of solidarity amongst murderinos. By explaining how she is not a "pretty young little girl" she rejects the victim blaming discourse which seeks to hold women accountable for their own victimization. This is an active counterhegemonic statement which seeks to underline that women are never responsible for the violence done to them. In this sense, the thread becomes a place of resistance against dominant notions through the sharing of women's personal experiences. The sharing of survival tactics and of one's own experiences of vigilance reflects the values of the podcast in the sense that the murderinos in the subreddit thread echo MFM's framing of vigilance as healthy and positive.

The acknowledgement of women's shared oppression is a "reactive pleasure" as it conveys *"(...) an understanding that one's ideological positioning is problematic in our culture"* (Brown, 1994; 18). This suggests that murderinos experience reactive pleasure from sharing their own lived experiences with vigilance and the anxieties related to their vulnerable position in society, within a women-dominated group.

As demonstrated with the comments presented within this subchapter, the MFM space can function as a space for women to discuss their relationships to true crime, a genre which, as demonstrated, naturally encourages conversations about fear of victimization, anxiety, vigilance, murder, survival tactics etc. which all can be connected to women's vulnerable position in larger society and the insidious trauma that many women deal with. As demonstrated with the comments presented within this subchapter, the MFM space can function as a space for women to discuss their relationships to true crime, a genre which, as demonstrated, naturally encourages conversations about fear of victimization, anxiety, vigilance, murder, survival tactics etc. which all can be connected to women's vulnerable position in larger society and the insidious trauma that many women deal with.

Summing up, by openly sharing their experiences and anxieties within the MFM community, one can understand that the anxiety of victimization that many women carry around, is acknowledged and believed in the MFM community which creates an environment where thoughts and feelings that are articulated through hegemonic notions can be reworked. This depicts how the discourse on MFM transcends to the community in the way

that the hosts consistently frame vigilance as positive and healthy. This is mirrored in how murderinos encourage and praise vigilance amongst each other.

The comments presented illustrate how the true crime genre of the community contributes to natural discussions about fears and anxieties of victimization. Furthermore, one can understand the community as a space in which women can voice their experiences and their survival tactics with other women. This can be understood as correlating with Brown's notion of 'reactive pleasure' as the women's shared acknowledgment of their subordinate social position in society can create a sense of solidarity within the community (Brown, 1994). By exchanging lived experiences and anxieties about victimization, murderinos can create a feeling of mutual validation. This can be defined as "feminine discourse" as it opposes the discursive hegemony of dominant culture that dismisses women by upholding gendered notions by calling them "crazy", "paranoid", "over-emotional" etc., hence preventing women from sharing their lived realities in dominant culture (Brown, 1994). The quotes brought forth in this chapter express a level of understanding and trust between the murderinos. This can be seen in relation to Brown's claim, that because women are a silenced majority in dominant culture, they find much pleasure in talking in groups where women make up the vast majority, as it can create a space where women's talk is not censured nor ridiculed (ibid).

The following chapter delves into murderinos' production of carnivalesque laughter and how this reflects the values of the MFM community.

Humor in the MFM community

As elucidated in *MFM Analysis,* humor is a key part of MFM. By making jokes about the murderer in their stories, the hosts signify a defiance against patriarchy, as the killer (who is typically, although not exclusively, a man who kills/rapes one or more women) embodies the toxic masculinity and misogyny of dominant culture. This chapter will elucidate how carnivalesque laughter is used within the community.

The following focuses on humor produced in the MFM subreddit, specifically where one murderino posted a picture of a tweet with the title: *"Why do I feel like this is something K+G would say?"*[16]. The tweet reads:

"You better hurry up and teach your sons how to not rape because I'm teaching my daughters how to cut dicks off. I'm running a cut first ask questions later Dick Cutting Academy."

The post received over 1100 upvotes which makes it one of the more popular posts on the MFM subreddit. The title of the post suggests a sense of familiarity with the hosts and a knowledge of how they talk/feel about certain subjects, e.g. their framing of rape culture. The title can be perceived as an indication of murderinos' shared knowledge of the hosts and their values. Brown explains how mutual knowledge is often in the form of shared history, much like a shared history of friendship where one can find comfort, but also be reminded of ambivalent situations (1994: 137). In this sense, when murderinos meet, they already feel a form of friendship due to their shared knowledge of MFM.

The highest rated comment read: *"shrugs Girls will be girls"*[17] (caseyweederman, September 29th 2018). The comment challenges the often worded phrase "Boys will be boys which t is used to indicate that it is normal and unsurprising when boys/men (mis)behave in ways that are rough or mischievous. The comment above reverses the position of the sexes and uses the phrase as an excuse for girls to "cut dicks off", mirroring a regular use of the phrase that seeks to defend and excuse boys/men who sexually assault women. In this way, the comment is rather political in terms of sexual politics. Amongst other comments were: "*If they're hanging it out there, and you don't like that…. well, they know the risks".*

Like the previous comment, the humor here is in the use of rhetoric which is usually applied to victim-blame women for the violence forced upon them. The reversal of power language and "parody of linguistic commonplaces" are quintessential carnivalesque discourse, therefore, by utilizing such linguistics for ironic purposes can potentially create a

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[16]

[17] See Appendix 3 III

sense of empowerment for women (Radulescu, 2012: 208). The comments consist of murderinos playing along, with comments such as: *"Where do I sign up?"* and *"Circumcisions, half off!".* However, some read the post differently, one person wrote: *"It's kinda double standardy",* which received -13 points, suggesting it is a rather unpopular opinion.

The popularity of the carnivalesque laughter reflects the carnivalesque aspect of the hosts' humor, as elucidated in *Laughter as Resistance.* It further affirms the female majority of the fandom as the humor mocks patriarchy and hegemonic social hierarchies, hence creating a position of defiance amongst murderinos. This can be understood as an expression of a discursive formation within the fandom due to the placement of power on women's perceived realities opposed to men's (Wetherell et al., 2011:74).

In summary, the shared body of knowledge can function as a shared history between murderinos which can create the feeling of friendship. Furthermore, the use of carnivalesque laughter amongst murderinos is popular which reflects the female majority of the MFM community and their position in larger society. The popularity of carnivalesque laughter thusly emphasizes the experiences and realities of women which invoke a shift in the gendered social power dynamics compared to dominant culture where women are the silenced majority (Wetherell et al., 2011; Brown, 1994).

The following chapter seeks to uncover how murderino participation and fannish production reveal certain values and resistive pleasures.

A murderino production

This chapter will uncover the ways murderinos participate in MFM and what values associated with certain gendered discourses are expressed through the fan production within the community.

Murderinos are an essential part of MFM. They send emails with hometown-murders which are read out loud as the sole content of the minisodes, they make the hosts aware

when they say something incorrect and they often urge the hosts to be more inclusive in their language i.e. when the hosts were made aware that the word "prostitute" is an offensive term, and was encouraged to replace it with "sex worker", which they discussed on the podcast in a "corrections corner". Furthermore, the hosts often discuss gifts of fanart they receive in the mail, and regularly put up fan-art on their Instagram account and the main Facebook group, which further conveys to the community that they are seen, heard and appreciated. Drawing on Jenkins (1992), this enables fans to not merely be receivers or "audience", but active producers who can both shape the discourses on the podcast, as well as within the community.

Murderinos are fans who are highly active producers of fan art. As mentioned in *My Favorite Murder as Case Study,* the art often illustrates a humorous comment on the podcast, which murderinos make into fan art. The comments which becomes popular catchphrases and turned into various forms of fan art are often casually integrated in communication between murderinos in the online community.

This subchapter will seek to uncover some of the fannish production within the community, specifically how some of the most popular phrases from the podcast are interpreted and made into fan art. I will further analyze what social norms and values of the community is represented in the chosen art and how the art expresses potentially resistive discourses.

Fuck Politeness - Fannish production and resistive pleasures

As aforementioned the term "Fuck Politeness" started off as something spontaneously uttered by Georgia. The usual process of the creation of murderino catchphrases entails murderinos latching onto such comments from the hosts, and then transcend them into various kinds of fan art.

"Fuck Politeness" has become a rally cry within the community ever since it was first uttered by Georgia. The term is a reminder and encouragement for women to listen to their

gut when they feel unsafe, instead of conforming to the hegemonic notion and expectation of women to be compliant and polite which became the death of many of Ted Bundy's victims as they agreed to help him load things into the trunk of his car.

The picture above illustrates Georgia as feminist icon Rosie the Riveter flipping the middle finger, with "Fuck Politeness" in big letters above her. This is an example of how murderinos draw upon materials from different dominant media and transform them into something specifically related to the MFM community, making it fit their own interest (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992). This specific fan art blatantly and playfully draws a connection between MFM and the feminist movement, emphasizing the defiance of conforming to hegemonic notions of femininity. Expressing resistive discourse through creativity is what Brown (1994) describes as a way for women to survive a subordinate status within dominant culture, and thusly make fun of dominant notions (Brown, 1994: 37).

"Fuck Politeness" as well as many of the popular catchphrases such as "Toxic Masculinity Ruins the Party Again", "Pepper Spray First, Ask Questions Later", can all be

seen as reactive pleasures, as they are rooted in a shared awareness of their subordination as women.

It has become particularly popular in the murderino community to cross-stitch which is a traditionally feminine practice. These cross-stitchings[18][19][20] blend the humor and crudeness of the podcast with the traditional feminine sewing practice, which creates a product that is by appearance soft and feminine, but with a loud counterhegemonic message which opposes the soft feminine style of the cross-stitch.

This style is also apparent in the MFM fan art- trend which converge the "inspirational/motivational quote" with an MFM quote. Inspirational/motivational quotes usually consists of a beautiful, serene picture of a natural setting, such as a starry sky or a meadow as depicted below, with a quote that is intended to inspire or motivate the receiver.
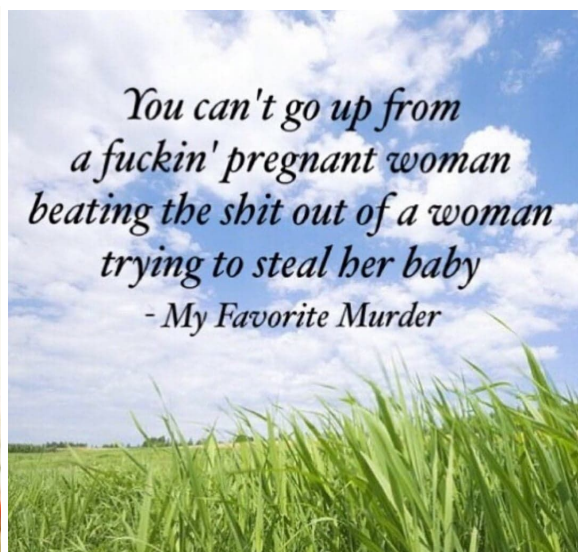
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[18]
https://www.instagram.com/p/BahMEJ8nBqt/?fbclid=IwAR0pIWwhuV10cZRjPWcUojw_Pz1Jq4062Cjh
IgZE6hRsCViMykyxCE_RXKQ

[19]
https://www.instagram.com/p/BK_zHaNgXlv/?fbclid=IwAR07JXHgv32ro6W766IIdtq_15NGgWLNMOg
mLVYUW_ga-aRC4GLOUCG8aIk

[20]
https://www.instagram.com/p/BaBDrWnnGlT/?fbclid=IwAR3a72k9KmTWP7Rt371XcmvaytgivJHAiEiW
10q1EGbZtYaYTVqA8h2RK-0

In the pictures above[2122], the blunt nature of the quotes create a comedic clash with the calm and idyllic motif of the pictures. This can be characterized as a strategy with the purpose of appropriating a specific art form for it to serve in a different and subcultural, compared to what was originally intended (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992).

What one can interpret from the presented fan art, is a murderino appreciation for producing art that depicts femininity and elegance, which then clashes with the casual and unfiltered quotes from the podcast. Framing a quote such as "You need some meds & not shitty weed" on a background of flowers, as if it was words to live by, then changes the way one reads the words, compared to if one simply heard it on the podcast.

Hence, MFM-fan art often plays on the humor of converging a medium with perceived feminine features, such as cross-stitching or inspirational quote-style pictures, and then adding an 'un-ladylike' quote from MFM which contrasts the medium. This particular kind of murderino art can be understood as a resistive pleasure as the art pokes fun at dominant notions of femininity by adding text which resist such notions (Brown, 1994).

21

https://www.instagram.com/p/BOQ-jFigmuE/?fbclid=IwAR07JXHgv32ro6W766Ildtq_15NGgWLNMOgmLVYUW_ga-aRC4GLOUCG8aIk

22

https://www.instagram.com/p/BNzK0n3gJRq/?fbclid=IwAR1LqFl06saY5TIUpSRXFThtsfkTuZV24IXXOWoeLrAmAHR_3LRQXl5v88M

Discussion

Throughout the analysis particular counterhegemonic values within the MFM community stood out:

1) Solidarity amongst women, which counters the hegemonic notion that women cannot get along because they inevitably compete over men.

2) Producing carnivalesque laughter which mocks patriarchal subjects and norms and creates a defiance within murderinos' discursive networks, as seen in "Toxic Masculinity Ruins the Party Again".

3) Experiencing "reactive pleasure" from the conversations that arise from the true crime stories which encourage murderinos to share their own experiences and realize that their own anxiety is in fact a structural problem.

4) Practicing and encouraging resistance against hegemonic notions of femininity, as seen in "Fuck Politeness".

The following seeks to situate these findings in a more nuanced perspective, and discuss underlying meanings of the research presented in *Analysis.* I will discuss the role of convergence in the MFM community and how this affects the community-building.

Murderino resistance

Murderinos express several resistive practices which mirrors the resistive practices of the podcast. The feeling of being an outsider in mundane society, as well as the true crime/MFM knowledge that murderinos share, all contribute to a feeling of solidarity between murderinos and underlines a key aspect of the murderino fandom and identity. Moreover, discussing anxiety and fear of victimization and practicing carnivalesque laughter further strengthen the solidarity between women in the community.

Drawing on the findings of my research, solidarity appears to be a core value of the MFM community which is the outcome of the resistive practices that are identified in murderino community-building. Solidarity arguably opposes a system of hegemony which seeks to separate women in dominant culture through upholding the internalized notion of women as natural competitors over men (Brown, 1994).

The values uncovered also illustrate how the hosts' framing of specific discourses affects the negotiation of the system of values within the community. This correlates with Jenkins' assertion that fandoms can function as a parallel community and alternative reality where values are more "human and democratic" opposed to mundane society (Jenkins, 1992: 280). Notions which seek to isolate women in dominant culture, such as internalized misogyny and hegemonic notions of femininity, are discursively broken through within the MFM community due to murderinos' participation.

Although the MFM community is counterhegemonic in several aspects, murderinos do not participate 'outside' of social structures. This is particularly prevalent in the MFM conflict, which will be further elucidated in *Reflection on intersectionality and further research.* The MFM community can thusly be understood in context to Brown's (1994) notion of "the beach" in the sense that murderinos are influenced by hegemonic notions of dominant culture, however, the MFM community facilitates a space in which women can identify and rework their subjugated position through their true crime interest (Brown, 1994: 150).

Drawing on Brown (1994), having a "feminine space" such as the MFM community in which women can talk amongst themselves, can enable them to create counterhegemonic discourses and rework them into their consciousness. Findings show that the impact of the hosts' vigilance discourse have helped many murderinos abandon the hegemonic notion of feminine politeness, and countless murderinos have tattooed the rally cry on their bodies. The MFM community can therefore, in extension of the resistive discourses of the podcast, work as a support system which can help and encourage women to carry out the reworking of hegemony in practice in their everyday lives.

Participation and power in MFM community-building

Looking at the findings, one can see that the hosts' discursive construction of the MFM community depicts murderinos as a women dominated, tight-knit community who are connected through a shared alienation by mainstream culture due their grisly interest. Furthermore, murderinos are discursively presented as sensitive and often struggling with anxiety, as illustrated in MFM Analysis. Findings suggests that the hosts' imagined audience are mostly women, and that at least half of murderinos struggle with anxiety or other forms of mental illnesses. The fact that Karen and Georgia can discursively participate in the construction of murderino identity differs from fictional main texts which much fandom research is concerned with.

Fandoms that revolve around fiction often engage in "poaching" the text by writing fan-fiction and playing with plots and characters (Jenkins, 1992). However, due to MFM being comedic narrative and commentary, the listeners are dealing with two real women telling real stories of tragedy, which does not exactly encourage fan-fiction. Jenkins explains that when fans produce their own creative material, they often do so in a way that seeks to critique the media they are consuming (1992: 283).

Murderino fan art often situates the hosts as subjects in the illustrations, or depict their humorous comments turned catch-phrases. By latching on to the comedic aspect of MFM, murderinos produce fan art which humoristically captures the social norms of the podcast, such as "Fuck Politeness" which, as aforementioned, can be understood as an encouragement of abandoning hegemonic notions of femininity. Hence, by sharing art that is shaped by the norms of the fandom, murderinos uphold these norms within the community (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992). The tone in murderino fan art can thusly be perceived as celebrating the hosts, which diverges from Jenkins' account of fannish production as a critique of the given media.

Fan fiction is often in response to the hegemony reproduced in the media, which is why fanfiction is overwhelmingly a female activity (Jenkins, 1992: 48). I have not encountered any fannish production that criticize MFM, this could be due to the fact that the true crime genre does not naturally encourage fanfiction due to its "fiction"-aspect, however, it can also be seen as an expression of the interconnectedness between hosts and murderinos that is discursively reproduced on the podcast through commonalities which creates solidarity. However, when one becomes a part of the MFM community, it is

presumably because one enjoys the hosts' narrative and humor. People who are critical of the podcast may listen to it once, therefore they will never engage in the community.

If fanfiction is typically produced as a resistive response to the masculine dominated media, as Jenkins (1992) argues, one can argue that the MFM podcast, much like fanfiction, can be understood as a resistive response to the misogynist narrative which traditionally has dominated the true crime genre (Caputi, 1987). By being emotionally candid and by focusing on the victims and ridiculing the murderers, Karen and Georgia then creates a feminine narrative which undermines the traditional true crime form in terms of gender.

The Intimacy of Convergence

The high level of engagement from murderinones with the hosts, and vice versa, enhances a co-dependent relationship between fans and hosts. Murderinos' enthusiastic participation has resulted in "corrections corner", minisodes, fan art, live-shows etc. which are essential for the overwhelming success of the podcast. The success of MFM is a good example of how a fandom has insisted on creating meaning from a text that has been deemed worthless or trivial by larger society (Jenkins, 1992). The immense popularity of a true crime podcast, hosted by two women who produces what is traditionally referred to as the trivialized 'gossip' or 'chit chat', is arguably linked to the liberties and accessibility of podcasting which makes it possible for diverse and unfiltered narratives to be told freely.

The portability of podcasts across time and space, the independence of creators, and the accessibility of gear, all make up the foundation for Karen and Georgia to create a podcast that is arguably the equivalence of "women's talk" which has traditionally been perceived as low culture (Markman, 2012; Brown, 1994). The fact that MFM is a podcast arguably makes the hosts appear more approachable, than if they were on TV, which is enhanced by their presence on several social media platforms where they can engage with murderinos and share their art.

In this sense, convergence culture enhances the intimacy between murderinos and hosts by allowing murderinos to fully participate in the text. Convergence enable murderinos in taking part of the production of MFM, but what are the consequences of blurring the lines?

Reflection on Intersectionality and Further Research

Karen and Georgia regularly say that they will do and say as they please because it is their podcast. However, the August conflict incited heated debate within the community especially regarding what the hosts should do/say in order to make up for their mistakes. It can be argued that convergence culture enhances the emotional investment that many murderinos feel towards the hosts, however, convergence culture arguably also enhances the sense of ownership murderinos have in the main text. The MFM conflict can in this sense be understood as a consequence of high participation (Jenkins, 2006a). It can also be seen as a disruption in the community incited by heated debates of "protocols of reading" which is meaning making that origin from fans' particular position within "the larger social formation" (Jenkins in Lewis, 1992: 211).

 In the initial stage of this research, my personal impression of the MFM community was credulous to some extent. However, as the conflict broke out in the Facebook group, it became clearer that there was a lot more underneath the surface. The conflict revealed a heightened level of censorship, as it emerged that women of color were banned for speaking out against racism. It became clear that white hegemony was being enforced and that what one sees when looking at the Facebook group does not represent the whole story.

 This brings me to the role of intersectionality.

 Jenkins asserts that fandom reflects a historical split between the male-dominated spaces and the newer more "feminine" kind of fandom which highlight "female" experiences (Jenkins, 1992: 48). However, Jenkins' account of fandom is predominantly constructed through studies of white female fandom, which renders non-white fans invisible (Pande, 2018: 319). Therefore, if one were to research the MFM conflict it would be interesting and beneficial, particularly in context to how murderinos as fans who pride themselves as being empathetic and inclusive, debate and negotiate criticism of the hosts and how these negotiations may potentially reproduce or resist white hegemony. Delving into the MFM community with a postcolonial focus on discussing the operations of the ethnic/racial/cultural identity can potentially destabilize the binaries which fandom research often operates within (ibid). The findings within this thesis should therefore be acknowledged as a product which is shaped by popular media texts that is rooted in a white eurocentric point of view. Moreover, I acknowledge that my position as a white woman and fan of MFM is biased as I am arguably the epitome of the MFM fan; a white, cis, middle-class woman (Sacks, 2017: 2). FCDA has guided me in my analysis through an intersectional feminist lense, however, this does not mean I am free from bias.

The therapeutic affordances and limits of the MFM Facebook group

Survey findings insinuate that many murderinos do struggle with mental health/anxiety. After examining the Facebook group and subreddit, findings show that many murderinos utilize the space for participating in MFM text. As illustrated in Analysis, many murderinos experience pleasure from sharing experiences and tactics of vigilance with other women. The awareness and articulation of one's subordination in dominant culture, is prevalent amongst women in the MFM community and is often discursively connected to murderinos' hypervigilance. Thereby, one can argue that the hypervigilance, also often described by murderinos as "paranoia", is rooted in insidious trauma which teaches women to stay alert of potential threats. Insidious trauma in women is inevitably linked to men because they are overwhelmingly the victimizers/killers of women (Muzak, 2009; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The survey findings can thusly suggest that many women find pleasure in engaging in a space in which their experiences and anxieties are not dismissed as "paranoia", but instead acknowledged, validated and shared by other women, which is one of the affordances of women's discursive networks (Brown, 1994).

People are often described as "suffering" from paranoia because their conviction that there is a reason to be afraid is up against a broad consensus to the opposite. Thereby, the ones who possess social power in larger society (men) are also the social group who victimize women. Consequently, women's experiences of oppression are silenced by hegemonic constraints on discourse in dominant culture. Thusly, when murderinos gather and discuss their anxieties and experiences through their true crime interest, they can come to understand that what feels like an individual problem, is in fact of a structural nature (Brown, 1994: 19). In this sense, the community appears to function as a therapeutic space for women to find solidarity and encouragement and simultaneously resist hegemonic notions of femininity through their shared true crime interest.

However, can certain community activity push women to become more scared and thereby cause more damage than help?

As mentioned in *Structures of MFM social media groups,* the Facebook group has a tagging system where posters tag the themes of the post, such as "serial killers" or "sexual assault" so murderinos can easily navigate within the posts. When the group was active,

several articles about murders were posted daily, reminding one of the regularity of murders, particularly in the US. As Vicary & Fraley (2010) elucidate, true crime can offer a narrative in which one can face the terror or trauma and survive as well as see justice for the victim. However, in news articles about daily murders and rape, the reality is often less optimistic than when one watch a show/movie or read a book about real events which are often chosen due to a satisfying resolution. Expert in anxiety and professor of psychology at the University of Sussex Graham C. L. Davey, writes in Psychology Today about a 1997 study which showed that people who are more exposed to negative news (such as crime, violence, war) are significantly more anxious and sadder, compared to people who are more exposed to positive news (Davey, 2012). Taking this into account can thusly suggest that while the MFM Facebook group offer a space to resist hegemony, the massive amount of news stories of murder posted on the group can enhance murderinos' anxiety and thusly keep women in a confirmed state of fear. Reading articles and watching news clips about current murders/rapes where the perpetrator often receives little to no punishment arguably does not offer the coping mechanisms which true crime narratives offer. In this sense, certain aspects of the MFM Facebook group may feed the anxiety without offering the relief of a just conviction.

Sharing news stories articles about murder is mostly seen in the main Facebook group which means that not all of the MFM sites encourage sharing murder-news. In fact, one can argue that the MFM community is an umbrella community which consists of over 500 mini-communities in the form of sub-groups which negotiate their values with a point of departure in murderino values and knowledge. The popularity of creating subgroups may insinuate that many murderinos want to transfer the solidarity of MFM fandom to smaller groups where additional interests can be practiced and values negotiated.

The mental health discourse on MFM has encouraged murderinos to participate and share their own experiences and struggles, hence creating what The Atlantic calls "a virtual support group" (theatlantic.com, 22/11). By expressing one's weaknesses and struggles, murderinos build a counter hegemonic discourse which places value on vulnerability and rejects the hegemonic masculinity of dominant culture that treat vulnerability as a weakness. MFM, and true crime in general, function as a sort of exposure therapy for many murderinos where they can face their fears in a controlled environment. In this sense, the community

adds another layer to the therapeutic affordances of the podcast as it allows for murderinos

to articulate, process and accept that their fears and anxieties are real and shared by many.

Further Works

When deciding on a field of research, one has to realize that it is not possible to cover all of the areas of interest. In this thesis, I have identified particular research areas that would be rewarding to further investigate.

Fan activism

The MFM fandom does not only discursively resist hegemony, as many murderinos have participated in local murderino-driven activism, as well as fundraising for causes such as End the Backlog. Further research could thusly delve into how participation and resistance in murderino activism intersect, and how the infrastructure of murderino practices urge a particular form of civic engagement (Jenkins & Shrestova, 2012). Where this thesis focus on quiet discursive rebellion in the form of resisting hegemony, it would elevate the research to examine the fandom on a more practical level.

Sub-groups

Further research could also entail analyzing the culture within an individual sub-group, and examine how a sub-group with a specific additional interest construct their own mini-community. One could examine how values may differ or correlate with values of the bigger groups.

Conclusion

My findings regarding women's interest in true crime correlate with the existing research which argues that many women take interest in true crime due to the insight in survival tactics (Vicary & Fraley, 2010; Browder, 2006). This further guides many murderinos participation in the MFM community as they can share experiences/tactics of vigilance with other women. By sharing experiences and practicing "women's talk" in a community of mainly women, murderinos are able to rework hegemonic notions through their shared interest in true crime and a mutual understanding of their subjugation, and vulnerable position as women in dominant culture (Brown, 1994). Findings further indicate that many murderinos deal with anxiety that appears to be linked to a hyper-awareness of their vulnerability in dominant culture, which they are reminded of in everyday life through seeing and experiencing sexualization and subjugation of women (insidious trauma) (Muzak, 2009). Using humor as a coping mechanism and subversion of patriarchal culture further enhances solidarity amongst murderinos. Laughter is a key value in the murderino community, and particularly carnivalesque laughter is popular amongst murderinos which can be understood as an expression of the contrast in gendered power dynamics to larger society, and underlines the MFM community as a feminine space (Whetherell et al., 2011, Brown, 1994). MFM fandom encourage a reworking of gendered hegemony into their consciousness through echoing MFM catchphrases such as "Fuck Politeness" and thereby create a counterhegemonic discourse in the fandom. By intersecting comedy and true crime, murderinos are able to critique the gendered violence and oppression in patriarchal culture.

Empathy towards victims is situated as a key trait in murderino identity, due to the fandom's enthusiasm of true crime which is often perceived by offensive by non-fans. Murderinos bond over this alienation from mainstream culture, in the sense that many have felt ashamed for their interest in true crime, particularly due to a clash between their gory interest and the cultural proscription for women to show an interest in violence. The solidarity

which arises from that shared position appears to be further enhanced by the hosts who discursively contribute to the construction of murderino identity.

So, to answer my research question "*How are hegemonic notions of femininity resisted and negotiated within the My Favorite Murder fan-community?*"

Murderinos' community-building expresses in many aspects a progressive and feminist construction of values, however, the August "dumpster fire" of the Facebook community can be seen as an expression of limitations of the community's feminism as the voices of murderinos of color, which called out racism, were deleted and banned from the group. The conflict and the hosts' subsequential archiving of the Facebook group can therefore be understood as a consequence of the interrelational aspect between MFM and its community, as well as an intense emotional connection to the podcast and participation of murderinos which encourages a feeling of ownership in fans which convergence culture facilitates. Furthermore, the conflict also illustrates how moderators, whose job it is to keep the community "a safe space", can use their power to obfuscate certain discourses, thusly upholding a distorted image of a harmonious group dynamic.

Nevertheless, the hosts' framing of gender in true crime narratives discursively enforce murderino solidarity, and can encourage murderinos to share experiences and anxieties that are rooted in women's insidious trauma. The sharing of experiences and mutual validation in murderinos' anxieties as well as producing carnivalesque laughter, discursively resist hegemonic notions of gender of dominant culture which potentially can be reworked into the consciousness of murderinos and potentially empower them.

Communication article

The following article is written for the American news-website and blog Huffington Post or "Huffpost" for short. The platform was created by Arianna Huffington who is a liberal leftist activist. Huffington Post has several different divisions such as "News", "Life", "Entertainment", "Communities", "Politics".

The "Communities" division has a subdivision called "Women" which is the platform I imagine for this article. The Women community contains articles that are often short and concise and are therefore appropriate for quick spreadable media. The form of the pieces vary from news articles to opinion pieces.

The readers of Huffpost "Women" are media literate and digital literate women, as they engage with the platform online and therefore know how to navigate within it (Jenkins, 2006a). The women who read Huffpost "Women" pieces can be assumed to be leftist/liberal women due to the liberal lense of the platform. The article will take its form as an opinion piece, targeted at women between 20 and 40. This particular group is relevant because it reflects an age group that can navigate online platforms as well as having an enthusiasm for true crime. Huffington Post will further fit the platform criteria for this piece due to their American roots, yet international range, much like MFM.

The opinion piece will elucidate a particular aspect of the thesis; the sociocultural link between insidious trauma and true crime fascination, and how this is linked to MFM and its community.This is chosen due to its compelling focus of merging a popular interest amongst women with a sociocultural explanation for this interest. The piece will mirror the casual and personal narrative of Huffington post opinion pieces and incorporate an eye-catching title. The aim is to elucidate the connection between true crime and insidious trauma and murderinos in a comprehensible language. Huffington Post is an obvious choice as a platform due to its leftist political lense, which is arguably fitting as "insidious trauma" tackle subject such as the subjugation of women which the platform is active in covering.

How women's true crime obsession may be linked to their oppression

-And how a podcast fandom is making the most of it

By Luna Stjerneby

If you haven't noticed the explosion of true crime in the media, I will assume you live under a rock. Netflix and HBO are filling up their archives with true crime shows like The Jinx, Making a Murderer, The Staircase, and many more and people are loving it! The people have spoken, and they want to jump head first into the twisted cases of some of the most brutal homicides committed by man. But why are people so hooked?

You might love true crime because you are fascinated by how the mind of a killer works, or you might love it because you love the thrill of it, like you're on the world's creepiest roller coaster. Or perhaps you don't love it at all and are thinking "Who are these freaks who love true crime?" In that case I can tell you that they are out there, and there are probably more than you'd think. But why are people so hooked on this grizzly genre. And who are these people?

A 2010 [study](#) shows that the majority of true crime fans are women which may come as a shock to some because society doesn't exactly put "interest in violent murders" at the top of the list of traditional feminine traits. However, the popular true crime comedy podcast My Favorite Murder (MFM for short) has opened the door to a fast growing community that already has over 200.000 members in the main Facebook group, and most of them are women who are relieved to have found others who share their fascination.

MFM and its community have already gained a lot of attention from popular online magazines like [The Atlantic](#) and [Rolling Stones](#). The success of the podcast is partly due to the hosts' honest and self-deprecating talk about their mental health struggles and fear of victimization, which evidently resonates with a lot of women who enjoy taking up these subjects amongst themselves.

 If you're a woman, think about the last time you walked home at night. Chances are you were probably walking with your keys between your fingers, or automatically scanning the

street to see if there are any men nearby, and if there were you probably picked up your pace or crossed the street.

I have talked to multiple guys about this matter and they are always very surprised to hear that I feel the need to do these things, and their surprised faces are often followed by a variation of the question "Don't you think that's a little paranoid?".

As women these little acts of vigilance are second nature to us. We are reminded on a daily basis that we are vulnerable in society. We see women being sexualized in commercials, romance is sold as a hunt where men have to wear down the woman until she finally realizes how "great" he is. We get the occasional grope in a bar, or the strange man who insists on starting a conversation with us in the street and then calls us a bitch for declining. We also see women who are sexually assaulted and brave enough to speak out, and we see repeatedly how her life is never as important as her abuser's reputation or career.

These daily reminders of our vulnerable position as women in society are what feminist trauma researcher Joanne Muzak call "insidious trauma". Muzak explains that these everyday reminders can leave a traumatic mark on women which often can result in women experiencing anxiety or depression.

A study shows that many women find pleasure in true crime because it offers survival tactics and gives you the opportunity to face your fears of victimization in a controlled environment, much like exposure therapy.

This brings us back to the popularity of MFM and the murderino community. A new study suggests that at least many murderinos find comfort and solidarity in being in the MFM community because they are around people who understand and share their anxieties and hypervigilance (and of course their true crime obsession).

This is of course not an explanation for all the women who love true crime, but it may offer us a deeper insight into the underlying structures that condition many women to seek out true crime as a source of survival tactics and coping technique to deal with the fear and anxiety that often comes with womanhood. And Karen and Georgia and their murderinos seem to have created a space where you can share survival tactics and unsolicited true crime facts without being judged.

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