The topic of violence against women has been on the radar of feminist media scholars for decades. The specific focus on young, dead female bodies being portrayed as corpses, however, is of relatively more recent scholarship. For example, Barbara Klinger, in her article entitled "Gateway Bodies: Serial Form, Genre, and White Femininity in Imported Crime TV," (2018), has found that the trope of the discovery of white female victims has been a way to make legible the transnational crime dramas being imported into various countries. Often paired with a female detective, these tv crime shows allow viewers from other countries to understand the stories that are being told in sometimes foreign languages and places and at the same time, to uphold a new kind of feminism that places the female crime detective front and center to the story.

At the same time that these bodies are currently being displayed, it has also been the case that the optics of showing these bodies, which are increasingly younger and more adolescent than twenty something bodies, has become a way to encourage viewership. The more graphic the image of the body being displayed, in other words, the more ratings are likely to be higher, since the titillation of showing sex and violence often boosts ratings.

This twin dynamic, that is, the rise of television shows which feature dead, often times adolescent female corpses or violent acts against young women, and the discourse of how these shows are feminist in their portrayal of female detectives, led me to ask the following question: how are female adolescents in a sense being sacrificed not only as a way to boost ratings but to demonstrate the feminist credentials of these transnational shows? To answer

this question, I set out to first explore the rise of these images more generally on these shows, that is, the rise of young women being victimized and oftentimes murdered. I then focused on the place of these images and stories in the context of the shows themselves, and the way in which their agency was compromised as they gained the status of victims. I then concluded by looking at how in this era where young women are being exhorted to rise above traditional gender stereotypes, on the other hand, they are increasingly being used to reinforce the idea that young women are voiceless victims. In the era of MeToo, this loss of voice is especially poignant and deserves to be challenged.

"Too Many Crime Series Feature Sexual Violence"

The rise of sexual violence on TV has been noted not only by media scholars such as Barbara Klinger, but by those who have written and starred in crime stories themselves. For example, John Banville is a Booker Prize-winning novelist who has written detective novels set in Dublin in the 1950s that were adapted by the BBC1crime series. He has publicly criticized the increasing violence portrayed on recent crime series ("Too Many Women are Victims in TV Drama," Daily Mail, 2014). He pointed to the fact that the majority of these shows invariably open with a scene of some young woman being raped or murdered and then "cut up and thrown in a dustbin (Banville, 2014). Sir David Hare, in addition, the well-known playwright, also lamented the fact that there is a mounting "body count," in these shows as well an increasing lack of realism. In their view, the lack of realism is tied to the sheer numbers of dead bodies these detectives come into contact with. In shows such "The Fall," "Silent Witness," "Ripper Street," all British shows, and the Scandinavian crime show, "The Bridge," which has been re-

done in France and the United States, the level of violence is far higher than in earlier crime shows. These shows have arisen in a television landscape where other genres, such as horror and fantasy ("Game of Thrones," for example,) also routinely portray violence and sexual violence against women in particular ("Why TV Shows like "Game of Thrones" and "Luther" Normalize Violence Against Women," Ruth Penfold-Mounce, Newsweek.com, 2016). While there has always been violence against women portrayed in film and television, recent shows have offered an increasingly detailed portrait of what the dead bodies look like, one that is meant to represent with authenticity a dead body.

These images, which real actors are asked to portray and which have effects on them as well, also play out in the larger culture in terms of what actress Doon Mackichan has described as a normalizing of rape. The idea of "crime porn" is part of this debate, where women's bodies our portrayed in fetishized images of violence and rape fantasies in shows such as "The Fall," starring Gillian Anderson and Jamie Dorn. In "The Fall," the main criminal is a serial killer played by Jamie Dorn and as part of his ritual violence against women, he lays out the victims in specific and artfully arranged positions. Whereas in earlier periods of film and television, the victim may have been raped or murdered as well, these shows are distinguished by the fact that the bodies of these young women are then made into fetishized objects.

At the same time these images of young women being raped, murdered and dismembered are arising, there is the counter-point of the female detective who is strong and empowered and who is avenging the violence perpetrated against the female. The excess of visual violence

against the younger woman, in other words, is counterpoised to the emergent feminism of the female protagonist criminal detective who tries to solve her murder.

In terms of a historical context, there have always been stories where women are in some kind of danger. These “women in jeopardy” stories where known in the publishing world in the 1970s and constituted their own genre. However, the stories that are now being told in film and television have become more frequent and the same plotline of a sadistic killer who pornographically murders and mutilates his young female victim has become a standard trope in these crime shows. Another trope is that of the older female character having been raped earlier in her life and this has become a raison d’etre for why she is avenging the murder of these young women. In a piece by Sonya Saraiya, called, “The truth about TV’s rape obsession: How we struggle with the broken myths of masculinity, on screen and off,” she notes that since the early 2000s, rape on television has become practically “de riguer,” with shows from a range of genres, from “Downton Abbey” to “Game of Thrones” portraying rape in graphic terms (Saraiya, 2015). Citing the book, “Prime Time” How TV Portrays American Culture,” she offers that “rape is a crime ideally suited to television. It is violent and therefore action packed. The sexual nature of the crime can easily be presented as the act of a violent, mentally unbalanced madman,” (cited in Saraiya, 2015).

In recent years, the murder and sometimes mutilation of young women has become on par with the rapes that are now being shown on television and film. And the lingering on women’s corpses is part and parcel of this new trope. In Rebecca Nicholson’s piece “True Crime makes

Great TV. But must it linger on women's corpses?" (2017), she begins by describing the TV show "Mindhunter," from Netflix. The show is set in 1979, and looks inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit, and focuses this time on a male FBI agent who has spent his career by profiling serial killers. Directed by David Fincher, a highly esteemed film director, it opens with a shot of a fax of a crime scene photograph which shows the body of a murdered woman, and then later more photographs, with one showing a dead woman tied to a bed, with a bloodied head, and in another there is a photo of a severed foot, which is wearing a stiletto shoe. Nicholson laments the way in which these "prestige" dramas tend to linger over the corpses of dead women, citing other shows such as "True Detective," and "The Fall." She notes that this is part of a larger fascination currently happening in modern culture, with killers and what motivates them, including the podcast "Serial," which investigated the murder of a high school woman Hae Min Lee in Baltimore supposedly by her ex-boyfriend Adnan Syed. In this story, as well as the documentary called "Making A Murderer," which looked at the case of a young photographer, Teresa Halbach, who was murdered by two men but who the documentary tried to make a case for their innocence. In both cases, the young women who are killed are more of a "footnote" to the story, even as they are the ostensible purpose of why these shows were being produced.

In another article entitled, "Blue Detective: "Sharp Objects" in the Time of the Dead Girl TV Show," by Lindsay Zoladz, the piece opens with a description of the body of a young girl that was just discovered – her body is portrayed in the window of an alley, and her stiff rigor mortis is visible, and in the next episode we will see that all her teeth were taken out with pliers. Zoladz then refers to an article titled "The Oldest Story: Toward a Theory of a Dead Girl Show,"

by Alice Bolin and published in 2014 in the Los Angeles Review of Books. Bolin pointed to a number of recent shows, including “Pretty Little Liars,” “Top of the Lake,” and the earlier “Twin Peaks,” as all having the familiar theme in common of a dead girl. The bodies of these Dead Girls, are routinely sexualized or made visually beautiful.

In terms of beginning to tie together the theme of the dead young girl and the woman who is trying to solve her murder, Bolin notes that “In the two great feminist Dead Girl Shows, “Veronica Mars” and “Top of the Lake,” the female protagonist is both trying to solve the mystery presented by a Dead (or missing) Girl and to solve her own rape, making the question not “What have I done?” but “What happened to me?” (cited in Zoladz, 2018).

Some writers, including Germaine Greer, have argued that women have been to blame for the rise in portraying sexual violence on television. She points out that “female victimization sells” and the primary people who are consuming these shows are women (Vincent, “An Assault on our television screens; As Germaine Greer blames women for the spate of sexual violence on TV, Alice Vincent points out why she is wrong” 2018). Greer notes that women make up 60 and 80 percent of readers of crime fiction and that the true crime television show viewers are primarily made up of women (cited in Vincent, 2018). Vincent counters by pointing out that the primary creators of these crime dramas are men, and that women directors in the UK, for example, are made up of less than 10 percent women. In the United States, women overall made up 28 per cent of the television creators, and producers, writers and directors in 2016-2017. As another counterpoint to Greer’s argument Vincent finds that women have become in a sense

desensitized to the violence and blaming women for being viewers is inherently unfair, since they have not created these shows nor are they being given other choices. Other writers, including Denise Mina, have found that crime dramas in novels is more nuanced and focuses more on the investigatory process than on the crime itself, and that these stories are written by female authors. In this vein, those who are involved with portraying these characters on television lament the fact that the violence against women has been ramped up. Helen Mirren, for example, who plays the main investigator in the popular series "Prime Suspect," has publicly criticized her own industry for focusing on young, female corpses. And, in a public letter to the British newspaper "The Guardian," a group of actresses, including Robin Weaver, Polly Kemp and Claire Cordier, as well as Doon Mackichan, demanded "a year without rape, violence, dead women on slabs [on television]" (cited in Vincent 2018).

Perhaps in response to the ubiquity of these images of the dead, white girl, some recent shows are trying to play with this and to some counter-images. For example, in the show "Riverdale," the trope of a dead girl is replaced with a Dead Boy. And, in the other show directed towards teens, "13 Reasons Why," the Dead Girl gets to tell her own story to help make sense of her suicide. In another new show, "Elite" from Spain, the teenage show is set in an elite high school and follows the lives of three students who were admitted on scholarships, with one of them in the opening shot is portrayed as drenched in blood. Unlike other Dead Girl Shows, which according to Bolin, have an Oedipal distrust in male authority figures, this show makes it less clear cut that there are Bad Men and Good Women.

These shows depart from the usual trope of the Dead Girl, which in a sense is really meant to serve as a “canvas” on which to portray the male detective’s struggle to work out his issues, or as Bolin notes, “a neutral arena on which to work out male problems,” (cited in Rebecca Renner, “Why America Is So Obsessed With Dead Girls,” 2018). In this vein the disappeared woman in “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo,” is similarly seen as a “puzzle” for Mikael Blomkvist, who serves as the book’s investigator and, according to Bolin, “The implication of this choice of vocabulary, if I am being uncharitable, could not be more clear: that women are problems to be solved, and the problem of absence, a disappearance or murder, is generally easier to deal with than the problem of the woman’s presence,” (cited in Renner, 2018). Usually, these male characters develop an attachment or obsession to the Dead Girl, and there is oftentimes as well a kind of sexual element to this attachment, one that replicates the fascination that the killer similarly had. At their worst, these characters and the shows where the Dead Girl opens the story, are seen by writers like Renner as serving the purpose of allowing men to see women as submissive at a time where they are losing their dominance over them in the larger culture. Seeking to validate whether this theory held any truth, Renner reached out to Dr. Kimberly Davies, who is a professor of sociology and chair of the department of social sciences at Augusta University, who offered an alternate theory that these crime shows actually play on the fears of women viewers. The reality is that while men are actually more likely to be a victim of violent crime, women are more afraid of it happening to them, citing the fact that 78 percent of murder victims were men and 20.9 percent of victims were women in 2015 (cited in Renner, 2018). At the same time, for Davies, this doesn’t necessarily go against the idea that Dead Girl media enforces a kind of social hierarchy. For Davies, as well, there is the problem that these

shows oftentimes portray the young woman, as in rape stories, as somehow being in the wrong place at the wrong time; or wearing the wrong clothes, and in general, her assault ends up seeming inevitable.

In another piece that explores the dead girl trope, Elle Hunt notes that streaming services like Netflix are continuing this trope with such recent shows as "You," which portrays a stalker and murderer and that they are generally choosing content that has a woman who gets killed, or abused or mutilated or raped ("The Dead Girl Trope: what Netflix's love of female victims says about its viewers," The Guardian, 2019). Hunt cites Linda Ong, who is the chief culture officer at Civic Entertainment Group, which serves as an advisor to the TV industry on consumer tastes, as finding that these shows are popular right now because they speak to the changing position of women in society. She finds that the viewers who are more traditional like to see characters in traditional gender roles, and that women who are portrayed as victims are serving these stereotypes.

Netflix has capitalized on this trend, by creating shows that highlight gruesome violence against women which are hugely popular. Netflix has over 60 million U.S. subscribers and is oftentimes binge-watched, and the fact that of the top three shows that were the most binged watched shows in 2018 were centered on death and violence, including "Making a Murderer" and "13 Reasons Why," suggests that this is a winning formula for them. In their defense, they have offered that they offer a huge variety of content and that by focusing on only one genre, that it is not reflecting the diversity of programming they offer. At the same time, however, citing

Chief Content Officer Ted Sarandos who was speaking to analysts at an earnings call, he noted that "One thing this quarter that's been incredibly exciting [is] when you see a big number like "Bird Box" and "You"…that tap into the global zeitgeist" (cited in "Does Netflix have a killer problem, March 21, 2019, Steven Zeitchik, The Washington Post.)

The problem with these shows, according to Steven Zeitchik, who cited a number of academics, journalists and mental-health experts, is that it contributes to a kind of tolerance for these kinds of things in real life as well as a "lingering fear" that can impact our lives. As for Netflix, Zeitchik found that it has taken the lead in producing these kinds of shows, outpacing HBO, where of the 15 most watched shows in 2018, only three centered on hard-edged violence. Other academics cite the fact that Netflix creates these kinds of shows is that it has found a successful formula.

And, writers like Robert Thompson, who is a professor of media and culture at Syracuse University, also note the fact that the delivery mechanism for Netflix allows for more privacy in our viewing of the shows, oftentimes watching the shows by ourselves as opposed to the earlier days of television watching in the living room with the rest of the family.

Another factor is that because of its algorithms, once a show has been consumed and produced and has proven successful it becomes more likely that other shows with similar violent content will be produced, which then contributes to a cycle of this kind of production and consumption. One example of this is their recent show called "The Disappearance of Madeline McCann," which was about a young British girl who went missing while she was on vacation with her family in Portugal. This show mirrors other true crime stories, and in defending its creation of

content that focuses on violence, content providers believe that they are merely meeting a demand that already exists. The question which is increasingly being asked by academics and journalists and those who work in mental health is whether that absolves companies like Netflix and other content providers of any responsibility?

Other writers ask the question whether it is okay to have these stories told, despite their visual imagery of young dead girls. In her piece for Tribeca Film.com, "There Are More Dead Bodies On Our Screens Than Ever Before – But That's Okay," Emma Pearse asks whether these shows are a form of exploitation, or just reflecting reality and if so, what's the alternative? She discusses one show, "Top of the Lake," made by the excellent filmmaker Jane Campion, which has the main lead detective, played by Elizabeth Ross, be savagely gang raped while we, as viewers, see it through the mist and hear her screams. She is later portrayed as then trying to find the missing body of a young girl. What is striking for Pearse is not so much that this happens but that it is a relatively new phenomenon to have this appear on a quality television series. Earlier depictions may have been expected in horror films or films that were explicitly dealing with an attack, but the ubiquity of these images on quality television shows has made it almost a commonplace occurrence to have incredibly jarring images of dead girls be in the opening scenes of the story. Pearse then cites Susie Linfield whose book, "Cruel Radiance" looks at the history of photography and violence and asks us to reflect on what those images mean. Pearse then says that she would like to challenge herself to try and understand why she has been so captivated by these gruesome images on these series? She asks the question whether it isn't more "clinical, somehow more sadistic to not show the bodies, just to be seduced into

the drama without the graphic details to mess with our day's outlook?" She asks us as viewers to in a sense take responsibility for our "thrill of the drama," and in so doing to "take on board the reality behind it."