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Gender Violence on Television: Insights and Implications from Female Audiences of Drama Series

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GENDER VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION:
INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FROM FEMALE AUDIENCES
OF DRAMA SERIES

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Communication and Information
at the University of Kentucky

By

Mary Celeste Clark

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Kyra Hunting, Professor of Journalism and Media

Lexington, Kentucky

2021

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

GENDER VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION:
INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FROM FEMALE AUDIENCES
OF DRAMA SERIES

Gender-based violence is pervasive across many television shows that are targeted toward a variety of audiences and cover a range of genres and settings, yet there is a dearth of literature regarding gender violence in fictional television drama series and how female audiences interpret and react to the depictions of gender violence in those programs. For this study, I spoke with 13 women about their experiences viewing programs with depictions of gender violence. The data was analyzed qualitatively using a phronetic iterative approach and demonstrates why these women watch these shows, what affective responses they have, and how they interpret the shows within a broader, societal context. Theoretical implications are offered for transportation, therapeutic catharsis, resonance and perceived risk, and eudaimonic gratifications. Practical implications are suggested for those who work on television drama series, including suggestions and desires from the individuals who were interviewed themselves.

KEYWORDS: Gender violence on television, female audiences, transportation, eudaimonia and appreciation, resonance and risk, therapeutic catharsis

Mary Celeste Clark

04/23/2021
Date

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OF DRAMA SERIES

By
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DEDICATION

To my grandfather, James L. Clark, who always believed I would write something great.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence is pervasive on television across many different programs and genres that target a variety of audiences. Gender violence against women can include domestic violence, assault, sexual harassment, rape, homicide, stalking, and more, and can lead to medical, psychological, and behavior consequences for victims (Robinson, 2003). Recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that 1 in 3 women have experienced sexual violence with physical contact, 1 in 4 women have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), nearly 1 in 5 women have experienced either attempted or completed rape, and 10% of women have been stalked by an intimate partner (CDC, 2020; CDC, 2021). Given these statistics, it is likely that many viewers of programs with depictions of gender violence either have personal experience with one or more forms of gender violence themselves or know somebody who has experienced gender violence, yet there is a dearth of literature exploring how female audiences interpret and react to these shows and the portrayals within them. Previous research has discovered that women that have directly experienced violence are more sensitive to violence in the media and are more concerned with the possible effects of the depictions, and thus hold higher expectations of creators in the media industry (Schlesinger et al., 1992, as cited in Bartsch et al., 2016). More recently, Bartsch et al. (2016) found that viewers of violent content reflected on the perceived truth value of the portrayals, the life-world relevance of the content, and the moral and psychological implications of the content depicted, but the majority of participants in this study were male and it was not specific to gender violence.

Television drama series that have overarching plot lines of gender violence could be an excellent avenue to explore how female audiences interpret violence against women

on television, because unlike with episodic series such as *Law and Order: SVU*, viewers spend considerable amounts of time with the same characters and narratives. When multiple episodes of television are perceived as a singular narrative piece, viewers may engage in higher levels of consumption or binge-watching behavior (Newman, 2009, as cited in Warren, 2020). Through interviews and qualitative analysis, this study aims to understand the viewing motivations for female audiences of these shows, explore what emotional and affective responses occur, and also ask women how they interpret the depictions within the broader, sociopolitical context of gender violence. Theoretical implications are offered for transportation, therapeutic catharsis, resonance and perceived risk, and eudaimonic gratifications, and practical implications are offered for the television industry and how we engage with media content that depicts gender violence.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explicates gender-based violence and examines how it is typically depicted in television programming. Following that, transportation is explicated to demonstrate how viewers may become immersed in the television series under consideration. Three theoretical concepts are also defined in relation to and as potential individual effects of viewing gender violence on television. First, I argue for a re-examination of catharsis in media effects studies, then cultivation theory is used to frame the phenomena of resonance and perceived risk, and finally, eudaimonic gratifications elucidates what audiences may gain from viewing meaningful television content.

2.1   Gender Violence on Television

Gender violence is a broad term that encompasses several different types of violence directed at an individual based on their gender identity. Specifically concerning violence against women, gender violence can include assault, homicide, domestic or intimate partner violence (IPV), rape, sexual harassment, breaches of fiduciary trust, stalking, incest, and child abuse, all of which can result in medical, psychological, and/or behavioral consequences for the victim (Robinson, 2003). These types of violence do not only involve physical abuse but can involve verbal or psychological abuse as well, such as gaslighting or mental manipulation, controlling behavior, and sexual or reproductive coercion (Modi et al., 2014; Sweet, 2019). Gender violence may be isolated to a single event, or it could be a chronic or recurring issue particular in instances of IPV, sexual harassment, or stalking (Palazzolo & Roberto, 2011). The World Health Organization (WHO) considers violence against women to be a public health problem that is rooted in gender inequalities and continues to perpetuate them, and this is especially true for sexual violence and IPV (WHO,

2021). Though these types of violence are also perpetrated against men and non-binary individuals (Hester, 2013), removing the word 'gender' from 'gender violence' could promote the false belief that the severity and pervasiveness of the act(s) is similar regardless of gender, which could in turn lead to misguided awareness campaigns and public health message (Reed et al., 2010). Additionally, previous research has found that people view female perpetration of IPV in a fundamentally different way than they view male perpetration of IPV, especially concerning what counts as significant violence, in what situations violence is considered acceptable, and whether the violence is perceived as trivial or severe (Lehrner & Allen, 2018).

Gender violence is omnipresent on television – it is woven into a variety of narratives and is sometimes depicted physically and graphically. For example, Cuklanz (2000) thoroughly examined rape on prime-time television between 1976 and 1990 and summarized the typical, formulaic portrayal of rape to be one that focuses on the problem of crime rather than the feelings and experiences of the victim, and spends more time highlighting male saviors, thus serving to construct a version of hegemonic masculinity. This basic formula as explicated by Cuklanz (2000) visually shows one or more of the following: a masked attacker who places his hand over the victim's mouth, a helpless victim unable to defend herself, and/or severe or highly noticeable physical injury shown to the victim, though the rape itself occurs off camera. This formula has been used continuously and is still used in programs throughout the 2000s, including in the pilot episode of the teen series *Gossip Girl* (2007) where Dan becomes a male savior to his little sister who is being sexually assaulted by another main character, Chuck, and she is depicted as helpless and unable to stop the situation herself (Van Damme, 2010). However, a wider

variety of depictions do exist outside of prime-time crime dramas, including in serial drama series and on shows that are exclusive to premium and/or streaming services like HBO, Hulu, and Netflix. As just one example, *Handmaid's Tale* (2017), which is exclusive to the streaming platform Hulu, has been likened to "torture porn" for including depictions of ceremonial rape on screen, women being shocked with cattle prods, body parts being removed as punishment, and one character is even subjected to a clitorectomy (Weber, 2018). Visual framing choices and the level of physical alteration shown toward the victim can contribute to the graphicness of the violent acts in these shows (Potter & Smith, 2010). For example, scenes in both *The Sopranos* (1999) and *13 Reasons Why* (2017) have depicted sexual assaults with a wide-angle, allowing the viewer to witness the entirety of the physical act and its shocking brutality. In contrast, scenes in *Big Little Lies* (2017) and *Unbelievable* (2019) have sometimes made the choice to crop in towards the victim's face, drawing attention away from the shock of the violence and instead focusing on the emotions portrayed by the actors.

Television portrayals of gender violence are not limited to physical depictions, though, and can include verbal and psychological abuse or relational aggression (Coyne et al., 2011), or may include what Boyle (2005) refers to as hidden violence, or violence that happens behind closed doors. For example, there are a number of instances of these types of gender violence in the teen series *The Vampire Diaries* (2009), including direct guarding and stalking behaviors, possessiveness, and extreme jealously, all of which are early warning signs of partner violence (Franiuk & Scherr, 2013). *The Vampire Diaries* includes elements that are reminiscent of Cuklanz's (2000) basic rape formula as well in that

vulnerability of the human female is often used as a plot device, and virginity and virtue are usually emphasized.

2.2   Transportation

Transportation is a mental process that occurs where a viewer is so focused or involved with a narrative that they become immersed to the point of losing sight on the real world around them (Green & Brock, 2000). The process involves a merging of attention, emotion, and visuals, and can lead the viewer to experience strong emotions related to what occurs in the narrative, trying to speculate about what will happen next, thinking about what could have happened differently to change the outcome of the episode or series, and overall, the viewer may feel changed by the experience of viewing. Recent research has found that binge-watching, or watching multiple episodes of a show in one sitting, can predict the occurrence of transportation, and this phenomenon has been compared to reading a novel in the space of a couple of days (Warren, 2020). Transportation has also been studied with the Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model (E-ELM) in that it limits counterarguing and reduces resistance for the messages presented within the narratives (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, as cited in Igartua & Barrios, 2012). This is important because it explains one way in which narrative persuasion can occur even with narratives that are designed for enjoyment – the implicit messages contained within the narrative can still cause persuasive effects, even if that was not the intention (Green & Brock, 2005, as cited in Igartua & Barrios, 2012).

2.3   Therapeutic Catharsis and Media Violence

In media effects research, catharsis is usually defined and tested in relation to aggression under the conceptualization that watching aggressive content can function to

purge viewers of their own aggressive tendencies (Gentile, 2013). However, this particular relationship between catharsis and media violence has received little empirical support (McCormack, 1978; Gentile 2013) and would likely not account for effects of female audiences watching violence against women given that the female characters in these shows are regularly depicted as victims and not perpetrators. The concept of catharsis is often attributed to Sigmund Freud due to his work regarding dreams, fantasies, and sexuality, though Freud never actually used the word 'catharsis' himself (McCormack, 1978). The concept is much older than Freud and dates as far back to Aristotle who utilized the word 'catharsis' in his definition of 'tragedy' in *Poetics* (McKeon, 1941, as cited in Gentile, 2013). Though catharsis is positioned as nearly synonymous with purgation in media research, the full definition as stated in the dictionary includes "a purification or purgation of the emotions (such as pity or fear) primarily through art; a purification or purgation that brings about spiritual renewal or release from tension," (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

The original conceptualizations of catharsis – both Aristotle's and the ones attributed to Freud – lend themselves to a definition more related to purification, or a therapeutic catharsis (Gentile, 2003). Therapeutic catharsis occurs when emotions are expressed and can function to balance one's mental health. Though this has not been studied much in media effects research, participants in intimate partner trials and trauma-focused research have expressed several benefits from their participation, namely validation of their feelings, motivation to seek help, and indeed, catharsis (Johnson & Benight, 2003; Valpied et al., 2014). The participants in those studies described that the cathartic effect came from the opportunity to talk through their trauma without fear of

judgment, and they experienced emotional responses such as crying and anger, and cognitive responses such as clarification and understanding of their thoughts and feelings. Freud created a model of therapeutic change that involved three steps: 1) insight, 2) emotional reliving, and 3) working through (Munroe, 1955, as cited in Bohart, 1980), and Bohart (1980) expands that working through "is a gradual process of adjustment… to newly acquired insights," (p. 199). The benefits from the trauma-focused research appear to loosely connect with the steps in Freud's model of therapeutic change, and it seems plausible that media could serve as another source to assist in those steps.

Aristotle's description of tragedy involved "dramatic tension" that is "built up in and during" the narrative, and that "catharsis is achieved for the story by reaching a resolution that feels satisfying," (Gentile, 2003, p. 496). Aristotle also believed that the emotions of fear and pity needed to occur for the viewer to experience catharsis and elaborated that narrative conflict between friends has the ability to arouse those emotions. This idea of catharsis fits well with stories of gender violence, as women in North America are more likely to be assaulted by someone they know, including current partners, rather than a stranger (Robinson, 2003). This conceptualization of catharsis shifts the process away from the viewer purging aggression through relating to the perpetrator of violence, and instead focuses the process to the viewer achieving catharsis through emotionally relating to the victim of violence. In this sense, catharsis may also be more likely to occur if there are characteristics of the victim that hold special salience for the viewer, which will be discussed more in the next section.

2.4   Cultivation Theory and Resonance

Television is formulaic in the way it presents stories and serves as a centralized system that continually repeats patterns involving ideologies, cultural myths, common knowledge, relationship dynamics, and more (Gerbner, 1998). Cultivation theorist Gerbner (1998) has elaborated that most of the variety we observe between television shows really just comes from novelty effects such as different actors or different settings, not from any significant changes in format or perspective. Television "offers a consistent meta narrative regarding sexual violence against women," (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012, p. 97), and some examples that pertain to the context of gender violence could include the repeated use of rape myths or the justification of interpersonal violence, including the placement of the common "virgin or vamp" archetypes onto victims of sexual assault, or the inclusion of the idea that "she was asking for it," (Greenwood & Lippman, 2007). These tropes and language contribute to the dominant paradigm of discourse surrounding gender violence, which focuses on violence as an individual-level issue and fails to connect or place IPV or sexual assault into a larger sociocultural framework (Lehrner & Allen, 2008).

Cultivation theory posits that heavy viewers of television begin to believe that the real world is like that of the television world due to repetition of dominant themes, and previous research has found correlations between heavy viewing and more sexist attitudes, greater levels of interpersonal mistrust, and fears of walking alone at night (Shrum, 2017). There is also a subset of cultivation theory called resonance, or the "double dose" effect, which occurs when viewers see something on television that reminds them of their own experiences (Shrum & Bischak, 2001). When resonance occurs, the memories of direct experiences combine with the indirect experience of witnessing television depictions,

resulting in that "double dose" or making the behaviors or themes depicted more readily accessible in viewers' minds. Additionally, resonance is more likely to occur when demographic minorities or subgroups with certain identity features are routinely portrayed as victims on television (Gerbner, 1998). Therefore, narratives of violence against women may hold more salience for female audiences, especially if they have direct, personal experience themselves. As an example, Custers and Van den Bulck (2012) found that when Flemish women were exposed to Flemish crime dramas, that exposure predicted risk perception, or the cognition regarding the perceived probability of them becoming a victim of violence, and that perceived risk directly correlated with their overall fear of sexual violence with no significant differences between younger (18-25) and older (over 25) women.

Though cultivation theory has generally been explored on a macro level in terms of total television viewing, there are recent studies that have looked more specifically at genre-specific and even program-specific effects (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; Lull & Dickinson, 2018; Potter, 2014; Quick, 2009). Studies have also moved toward tailoring criterion variables, such as types of violence, to the genres that are relevant to the study (Shrum, 2017). Previous scholars have critiqued selective definitions of violence due to the fact that the definitions regularly omit threats, verbal abuse, or non-physical depictions and consequences (Boyle, 2005). Boyle (2005, p. 23) states that "if patterns of abuse on screen were to mirror patterns of abuse off screen," then a large percentage of gender violence against women would not be included in these cultivation analyses, which could hopefully be remedied by a more inclusive and representative conceptualization and operationalization of gender violence.

2.5   Eudaimonic Gratifications

People generally think of television as entertainment, and when people watch fun, comedic, light-hearted television shows, they may experience hedonistic gratifications or feelings of enjoyment (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Rubin, 1983). Hedonism does not necessarily explain gratifications obtained from sad, serious, or poignant shows, though, so Oliver and Bartsch (2010) explicated appreciation as a eudaimonic gratification that can account for more emotional or moving media content. Enjoyment and appreciation are not mutually exclusive, but appreciation is typically higher for somber content such as dramas, or content that has thoughtful portrayals of the human condition and human experience (Raney et al., 2020). Eudaimonic media motivations involve meaningfulness-seeking (in contrast with pleasure-seeking for hedonic motivations) and the viewing experience requires effortful interaction with the content "which is characterized as a slower, more deliberative, and interpretive process," (Raney et al., 2020, p. 260). Eudaimonic gratifications are characterized by affective components such as empathy, elevation, hope, awe, and the cooccurrence of both positive and negative emotions. They are also characterized by cognitive components including meaning-making, cognitive challenge, emotion regulation, and elaboration.

There is certainly some overlap with similar responses between pleasurable and meaningful media content, but only meaningful content thoroughly deals with issues of sorrow, pain, and tragedy, and affective responses to meaningful content include sadness, anger, compassion, and happiness (Oliver & Hartmann, 2010). Eudaimonic gratifications and appreciation have been studied in regard to violent content through looking at moral disengagement and morally ambiguous characters (Bartsch et al., 2016; Meier & Neubaum,

2019; Tsay-Vogel & Krakowiak, 2016), but should also be studied in relation to gender violence, as drama series with depictions of violence against women also spotlight stories of sorrow, pain, and tragedy; therefore, similar affective responses and gratifications may occur from viewing those programs.

2.6   Research Questions

Keeping the four aforementioned theoretical concepts in mind, I wanted to attempt to capture the entire viewing experience from the perspective of female audiences, starting with why they choose to watch shows that have graphic depictions of gender violence, then exploring how the shows make them feel and how they see them fitting into the larger, sociopolitical context of gender violence. The first two research questions were crafted in an attempt to address the individual-level aspects of the viewing experience:

RQ1: Why do female-identifying audiences choose to watch fictional television drama series that contain graphic depictions of gender violence?

RQ2: What emotional and affective responses do female-identifying audiences have to narrative and on-screen depictions of gender violence?

And then the third question was crafted in order to investigate how the shows function within our society:

RQ3: How do female-identifying audiences interpret television depictions of gender violence within a societal-level context?

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured respondent interviews in which participants had the opportunity to speak about their individual interpretations and experiences of viewing television shows that contain depictions of gender violence (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Tracy, 2020). Qualitative methods were appropriate for this study because they allow participants to elaborate on their own opinions and experiences in depth. More specifically concerning this study, qualitative methods are a great way to explore individuals' accounts regarding "how specific texts are interpreted according to the explanations they favor," (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 223). Given the topic of study, interviews were more appropriate than focus groups because focus groups cannot guarantee participant confidentiality.

3.1   Participants

I utilized criterion sampling in recruiting participants for this study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). The criteria for participation were that potential participants had to be over 18 years old, identify as female, and have watched at least one full season of one or more of the 16 shows listed on the recruitment script. The shows listed on the script included drama series that aired between 1990-2019, had multiple or ongoing depictions of gender violence in them, and were all shows that I was familiar with enough to be able to discuss easily (at the time of recruitment, I had watched the entirety of 11 out of the 16 programs and had seen at least one season of the other five). The shows listed were: *Twin Peaks*, *The Sopranos*, *Nip/Tuck*, *Veronica Mars*, *Gossip Girl*, *Vampire Diaries*, *Game of Thrones*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Jessica Jones*, *The Affair*, *Big Little Lies*, *13 Reasons Why*, *Handmaid's Tale*, *You*, *Euphoria*, and *Unbelievable*.

To recruit participants, I posted information about the study and the inclusion criteria on my personal Instagram page, my Instagram story, and my personal Twitter account. The commenting feature was turned off for all of the posts to protect the identity of interested persons and ensure confidentiality. This resulted in a total of 13 participants ranging from 20 to 67 years old (M = 29.7 years), 69% Caucasian (non-Hispanic), 15% Asian, 8% White/Hispanic, and 8% White/Arab. Participants were also asked about their sexuality: 69% reported being heterosexual, followed by 23% bisexual and 8% homosexual. This sample is not representative of the state that the research was being conducted in (84.1% White/non-Hispanic, 3.9% Hispanic/Latinx, 1.6% Asian), but not all of the participants resided in the state.

3.2   Data Collection

Interviews were conducted over a two-week period in March 2021 via the web conferencing application Zoom. Only audio was recorded and both parties had their video turned off for each interview. During the interviews, I took a responsive interviewer stance which allowed me to share my own opinions of the shows discussed while simultaneously building a reciprocal relationship with the participants (Tracy, 2020). I also used dialogic interviewing techniques such as probing and mirroring to open up a space for transformation and collaboratively construct meaning with the participants (Way et al., 2015). The interviews ranged between 49 to 76 minutes in length (M = 59.8 minutes) and were transcribed manually within two weeks after each interview took place, resulting in 153 pages of single-spaced data.

The interview guide consisted of 17 main questions with possible probes included for most questions (see Appendix A for complete interview guide). The first three questions

were to collect participant demographics and asked about age, race/ethnicity and sexuality. The main conversation opened with three questions about television viewing habits including "How do you typically decide what television shows you're going to watch?" to allow participants to get comfortable speaking with me and also to get a general idea of how they engage with television. The next three questions involved shows participants liked specifically in the drama genre, including "What is it that you like about those shows?" and "Do you find the characters to be relatable?" At this point, I provided the following definition of gender violence:

> Gender violence may include sexual assault, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or dating violence. These terms encompass acts including physical behaviors such as pushing/shoving/hitting, rape, and/or stalking. Additionally, these terms can include verbal and psychological abuse such as making threats, controlling behavior, financial abuse like stealing, hiding, or controlling money, and also gaslighting, which is a way of manipulating someone into questioning their own sanity.

After providing this definition, I proceeded to ask four questions about shows with depictions of gender violence. These questions included "Are there any particular scenes you recall that stood out to you, or resonated with you?" and "How does watching those shows make you feel?" The next question gauged whether the participant found these shows to be realistic in the way they depict gender violence: "Do you think the various depictions and scenes of gender violence on television are representative of gender violence in the real world?" The next two questions were about if and how participants talked about the shows with their peers and on social media, and finally, I ended with one

catch-all question to collect final thoughts and open a space for the interviewees to bring up any topics they wanted to talk about that they felt were important and may not have discussed already.

3.3   Data Analysis

I utilized a phronetic iterative approach in analyzing the interview data for this study (Tracy, 2020). This approach involved developing tentative explanations of the data in early interviews and from existing literature, and then comparing those initial explanations with knowledge gained from subsequent interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Additionally, Tracy (2020) explains that phronesis is concerned with providing guidance on social practice and action, and that was a major concern of mine while conducting this research and writing the results as well.

To begin, I immersed myself in the data while transcribing and I continued to read the interview transcripts multiple times both prior to and during coding. In addition to the transcripts, I created a document where I sorted quotes from the interviewees and organized them by what show the quote was about in order to see if patterns existed among programs. I printed that document along with all of the transcripts and physically coded on the printed pages. I started by open coding the first five interviews (about 38% of the data), assigning a word to each line in the margins to indicate what the participant was discussing. I then used the open codes to develop first-level descriptive codes and proceeded to code the entire data set in chronological order using different colored gel pens to underline the text that went with each code (see Appendix B for complete codebook). Some examples of these first-level codes include audience, consequence, educational, emotional reaction,

graphic violence, morality, personal experience, physical reaction, realistic, setting, sexual assault, and visuals.

After the first-level codes were developed, I began to explore the relationships between the first-level codes and started arranging them into second-level thematic codes based on the research questions and on existing theories. This resulted in eight primary codes with between three to five sub-codes for each. I coded the entire data set with these codes as well by writing the names of the codes on different colored page marker Post-its and placing them next to the appropriate portions of text. The primary second-level codes were selecting programs, transportation, therapeutic catharsis, eudaimonic gratifications, resonance, evaluations of the depictions, societal implications, and improving television. Examples of the sub-codes include genre, need to know, talking with others, empathy, fear, glamorized, sociopolitical connections, and hopes for the future for each primary code respectively.

3.4   Ethics and Reflexivity

Gender violence is a topic that has been important to me for over a decade, and it became an especially salient issue for me my freshman year of college (2012-13). That year, and every year since then, I have witnessed various acts of gender violence and have had personal experience with gender violence myself. Having seen firsthand how pervasive the issue is – on my college campus, in the bar I worked at, in my personal life, at concerts, in parking lots, hearing my friends' experiences. I had a growing desire for helping somehow and began thinking about the factors that lead to gender violence and the way we talk about the issue in our society. In 2017 I binge-watched newly released series *13 Reasons Why* and *Big Little Lies*, and also the three seasons that were out of *The Affair* at

that time. The three shows are quite different, but all three contained depictions of gender violence and all three had a strong impact on me personally. *13 Reasons Why* was extremely jarring in how graphically it showed depictions of two teen girls being sexually assaulted, and one committing suicide, *Big Little Lies* was the first show I had seen that presented domestic violence in such a robust way, and *The Affair* was fascinating in how it tackled memory bias and unreliable narrators. It was at that point it occurred to me that television is one way in which we engage with the issue of gender violence, and if it had an impact on me that it was possible it was impacting others as well. So, my interest in gender violence on television was one of my primary motivators for deciding to attend graduate school, and while working on my degree I have committed myself to seeking out more programs that were engaging in the discourse of gender violence and exploring the issue from different theoretical and paradigmatic perspectives.

I do believe that my identity as a young woman who had also viewed these programs enhanced my rapport with the individuals I had conversations with. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2019, p. 266), "The social and communicative compatibility of the parties – such as a woman interviewing a woman… – might also inspire confidence in the researcher's good intentions from the start and thus ease the way toward a frank discussion of sensitive topics." We all shared the same gender identity, we all had watched at least a couple (if not more) of the same shows, and as a 26-year-old, I believe I am close enough in age to have related to the younger participants while also having enough experience to be taken seriously by the older participants. I used a casual tone for all of the interviews, and despite the seriousness of the topic, there were still moments of laughter and lightheartedness in each conversation.

I received approval from my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research, and I consulted with the university's Title IX Coordinator given the topic and my position as a graduate student. I took great care to incorporate relevant ethical and safety recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding conducting research about domestic violence research: I informed potential participants upfront that the study would include questions about gender violence, I reassured them that they could skip any questions that they wanted, and after the interview I provided each participant with a mental health resource sheet that listed campus, community, and national resources (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002). All of the interviewees were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms, and if they did not have a preference, I assigned them a pseudonym before saving an of their data to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, I remained conscious of relational ethics by opening up the space for participants to be as vague or as detailed in their answers as they would like and encouraging them to discuss any topics I might not have asked about but that they wanted to speak on (Ellis, 2007). I did not think it was necessary to ask whether interviewees had experienced gender violence themselves, and therefore if that information was offered, it was offered on their own accord. Ellsberg and Heise (2002) stress that there is a moral obligation on the part of the researcher to use study results for social change, and I very much look forward to publishing my results and discussing them with others in an effort to encourage viewers to engage more critically with the depictions they see of gender violence on television, and hopefully encourage those in the media industry to enact positive change in how they depict the issue in their future work as well.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Female viewers of television dramas experience a wide range of reactions to the scenes and narratives involving depictions of gender violence. Common emotional reactions were anger, sadness, shock, discomfort, and/or feeling horrified. Some participants had physical reactions to the shows, too, including crying and feeling sick to their stomach. In describing her "horrified feeling" watching scenes of gender violence, Daisy explained:

> I cover my face a lot when I don't like what's happening, but I don't cover
>
> my eyes. Like I just kind of hold my face. Um, I start to fidget maybe a little
>
> bit, or I definitely cry. I cry very easily when I see stuff like that.

Lucy also had strong reactions to scenes of gender violence, and described, "actually screaming like, I'm like actually screaming, gasping, um feeling physically shocked." Some of the strongest reactions came from rape scenes or scenes of physical violence, particularly in *Game of Thrones*, *13 Reasons Why*, and *Big Little Lies*, but viewers responded to other aspects of depictions of gender violence as well, including victim-blaming and seeing characters in therapy afterward.

Despite the occurrence of the aforementioned reactions, female viewers continued watching these shows and engaged with them on deeper levels. This analysis will explore how women come to watch these shows and why they continue to watch them, as well as some of the effects they experience on an individual level. Following that, this analysis will synthesize participants' evaluations of what is presented realistically compared to real life, how they think these programs fit within our sociopolitical context, and finally, what they hope to see in the future of television.

4.1   Why We Watch (and Keep Watching)

There were three primary reasons why the interviewees chose to watch these drama series in the first place: 1) genre of the shows, 2) streaming platform algorithms, and 3) word of mouth. Regarding genre, all but three of the participants reported liking some form of mystery, suspense, thriller, horror, crime and true crime, "darker, gory stories," and "well-written dramas." Whitney and Della reported liking teen dramas and romantic dramas or chick flicks respectfully, and Lucy seemed less concerned about genre and more interested in the setting of the show, explaining that she likes "alternate reality" such as fantastical worlds and historical dramas. Word of mouth was also a common reason for selecting shows, and that occurred through peer recommendations, social media buzz, and/or popularity of the show. Finally, some participants chose what shows they wanted to watch based on what the algorithm on their chosen streaming services pushed to them based on other shows they liked or again what was trending at the time.

All of the interviewees became invested in the shows they were watching which was apparent through their reports of reacting to the content, feeling a strong desire to know what would happen next, and through their continued elaboration and involvement with the narratives post-viewing. Some participants reacted not only to depictions of physical violence but also to the way the narratives followed through or followed up on the violence. One participant, Vicki, described the anger she felt about how the survivor of violence is often treated:

> And another thing that makes me angry, um, and a lot of shows depict that
> and that's also true for real life, is how other people who should be
> supporting the victim or the survivor are actually casting blame on them or

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telling them to move on… it would be fair to say it almost makes my blood

boil anytime anybody says move on or it might be something that you did.

Another participant, Clarice, described becoming "teary-eyed" watching the scenes of the character Celeste going to therapy in *Big Little Lies*, explaining that the show "doesn't let you forget it because Celeste doesn't forget it." Elaine also reacted strongly to *Big Little Lies* and recalled a close-up of Celeste's face being shoved into the couch by her husband. Similar to Clarice, Elaine felt that "you cannot look away from her face in that shot, like that, that's all there is to look at."

When asked about why they continue to watch programs that might make them upset, a large percentage of the women said they felt that they needed to know what was going to happen next. Della elaborated on how the way episodes are structured, and how with drama shows "the end of the episode [is] one big question mark, and that kind of makes you want to keep watching just to see what's going to happen." Margaret felt similarly and said that the shows "are so good at ending them in a very suspenseful I want to see the rest of this way," and Vicki matter-of-factly stated regarding *Handmaid's Tale* where "you see somebody getting raped in pretty much every episode," that "you just keep on watching."

Even after the episode or series was over, many participants continued thinking about the content of the show and what happened in the narrative. In some instances, participants talked with other people about what they had viewed. Erica discussed what she did after finishing the first season of *Euphoria*:

I think at the end of the, uh, the series it was like a lot of questions. I mean,

I immediately tried to interpret instead of just sitting with the end… I was

quick to trying to see what other people felt about it, because I mean it was

just, there was, it was so chaotic.

In other instances, interviewees continued to feel lingering emotional responses after viewing scenes. After going into considerable detail about the death of the character Ros in *Game of Thrones*, Lucy talked about how she felt afterward:

And I think in that sense it disturbs me, even afterward, because it reminds

me that this isn't just a TV death, there are women who were and are going

to be killed in much the same circumstances.

Lucy also said that the depictions make her "think about like the particularly gratuitous nature of violence against women as it's depicted on TV," and that "especially in the case of *Game of Thrones*… it becomes much more gratuitous and like lingering almost."

These responses detail an almost linear process of choosing to watch a show based on likes and recommendations, becoming absorbed with the program to the point of emotionally reacting, and then continuing to think about the show afterward, and some participants did acknowledge that this is intentional on the part of the creators. Courtney and I talked about how in *Veronica Mars*, we learn in the pilot episode that the lead character, Veronica, was a victim of date rape, but that the show does not deal with that fact again until about ten episodes later. Courtney said she does not like that the show introduces Veronica's character and elaborated that Veronica's experience almost functions as a "teaser" for hooking people into the show. And in discussing how a lot of

shows get more violent as the season goes on, Margaret chillingly mused, "it's almost like seeing the violence is your reward for watching." Courtney's and Margaret's statements demonstrate an awareness of how these programs utilize gender violence as a plot device and a way to capture and maintain viewer attention, and despite varying levels of distaste at this function of violence, the participants' continued involvement with the programs opened up a path for other effects and elaborations to occur, including those discussed in the next three sections.

4.2   Therapeutic Benefits

Three of the participants, Clarice, Erica, and Vicki, appeared to have experienced therapeutic benefits to watching shows with depictions of gender violence in them. Clarice and Erica both chose to disclose that they had personal experience with gender violence (dating violence and stalking, respectively), and that impacted how they both responded to and processed the shows. For Erica, the experience of watching a show about a stalker felt familiar:

> I really was interested in the *You* series… but it was like I've had my own experiences of being stalked, so like, you know, it's, it's just like that shock value of being put back into a traumatic experience and sort of seeing it in a different light. Um, sometimes, as fucked up as it sounds like it's almost like, kind of like a comforting feeling like a familiarity… It's just how I connect with things… it's sort of seeing like new perspectives of, you know, common problems of the world.

And for Clarice, when good things happened in *Big Little Lies*, she said "it is therapy," particularly the ending of season one where the rapist and abuser dies.

Though Vicki did not mention having personal experience with gender violence, she did say that she comes "from a society that's very patriarchal," and "that in some part is one of the motivating factors" for watching shows with strong female lead characters. Vicki also talks about the scenes depicting gender violence with one of her best friends, since they regularly watch the same programs:

> Honestly, I think it's a way for us to calm each other down and we're like did you watch that, did you see how horrible it was, and the other person's like yeah, yeah. Once you talk about it I think that's another way to get your mind off of it, because you kind of you know vented in a way and then you're done with it.

She continued to explain that she feels better after talking with her friend because it validates her feelings, and it's reassuring that her friend reacted to or got angry about the same things.

For these women, the shows seemed to function as a way to process and, in Erica's words, "it builds a community in a way." In going into more detail about her thoughts and experiences, Erica said:

> You know when we think about statistically how often violence towards women happens... I think it's just for us to connect with one another, um, because reality is a lot of people are quiet about what has happened to them, and so seeing it is sort of a therapeutic way of processing their own experience, too... I think it's more like, um, connecting with what has happened maybe in their past or maybe in their sister's past.

Erica also uses media depictions with her clients because she has learned that talking about trauma through what has happened to fictional characters is "not as emotionally draining for them." Neither Shelly or Olive appeared to have gained therapeutic benefits or processing in the way that Erica, Vicki, and Clarice did, but they did echo Erica's sentiments in that they believe the depictions can help other people. Shelly believes "it's also a way for us to, to sort of examine these issues… without having to be stunned by a horrific act in our own life," and Olive views it as an opportunity for survivors of violence "to see themselves not as an other, but really like part of a group and a community where they're not alone." In this sense, participants viewed relating to the fictional victims as a positive way to process and heal, but relating to and/or considering similarities between themselves and the characters and the situations they were in sometimes had a more negative impact.

4.3   Perceived Risk and Fear

Though some of the shows provided some positive processing for three women, they also functioned to reinforce some participants' perceptions that they could be victims of violence. Some of the women were concerned that if these things could happen to characters they consider to be strong, beautiful, or well-off, that it could most certainly happen to them, too. Vicki asked about a character in *Scandal* who is in a position of power, "and this is happening to her… then what about the rest of us?" Margaret had similar feelings about Celeste in *Big Little Lies*:

> And then you think like it could happen to someone like her with all those
> resources and she herself was an attorney. And you think about, you know,

a woman who doesn't have those kinds of resources, they would be even

much more at the mercy, I think of, yeah, victim-blaming.

The characters did not necessarily have to be particularly well-off for the interviewees to feel this way, though, and Courtney explained how a recurring plot line about date rapes on a college campus "kind of hits more home" for her. She elaborated, "I know that this, this happens in real life and it is not just an episode of *Veronica Mars*, so, and it could happen to me so it's still scary."

In some instances, the depictions of gender violence on television created or reinforced feelings of fear, too. Courtney originally watched *Veronica Mars* when she was a child, and she still thinks about the depictions now that she is an adult:

Oh my gosh. I was so scared to like go out at night, even though I was a kid essentially just playing outside at nighttime, but I still think about it like to this day, like if I'm walking on campus now at night, I'll think about season two of *Veronica Mars* where there's a series of rapes on campus.

Similarly, Erica was affected by scenes of gender violence in both *You* and *Euphoria*:

Each of those were like incidents where they were alone, um, so like, you know, being, I guess tossed around. And, um, so I mean, I think it really stuck with me because it was like instilling the fear of being alone.

Finally, Shelly also felt this way about taking the stairs in parking garages alone after seeing a rape scene in *The Sopranos*, explaining that "it can be a scary thought to think… there could be somebody on the other side just ready to, you know, abuse me." A few of the interviewees were able to put a positive spin on this feeling at least: Elaine felt that the

depictions can inform women about what "could be out there lurking," and Olive picked up practical tips about holding her keys in between her fingers when walking alone at night. In Courtney's words, it is a "societal instinct" to "know that these things are probably going to happen to you at one point in your life as woman." These quotes imply that programs can serve an educational or informative function, and also that they can contribute to understanding of gender violence and how it can affect women in real world situations.

4.4   Appreciation and Understanding

Most of the participants found the shows to be meaningful on some level and experienced empathy and understanding through viewing the depictions of gender violence. Jodi mentioned that though rape scenes are "never fun to watch," there were other "good things happening" to make up for them. Courtney "constantly" reflects on "how weird it is" that she engages with content about murder, violence, and rape "for fun, pretty much," but that "the human mind and human experience" are interesting to her. Margaret shared a similar sentiment, that though she does not enjoy bloody or gory stuff, or "seeing people shot… or beaten up," that she finds the "psychology of it" fascinating. Erica elucidated a broader theme of characters feeling shame or ashamed of who they are in the show *Euphoria*, which she found relatable because "that's like an underlying theme… with a lot of people no matter like where they are in life."

Empathy and pity were frequently mentioned in the conversations, and how those feelings were able to lead to greater appreciation and understanding of the issues. The fact that television serials allow viewers to get to follow the same characters through multiple episodes seemed to contribute to Erica's feelings of empathy:

Because you grow to care about these characters, um, whether they have

conflict in their life, within themselves, whatever, I mean you grow to care

about them, so when you see something traumatic happen to them I feel like

it's teaching the people to be a little bit more defensive and caring about you

know what has happened to these people.

Other participants appeared to grow to care about characters, too. For example, Shelly described "feeling bad for" the character Adriana in *The Sopranos*, as that is a "heartbreaking depiction" and the "rollercoaster of just watching her go through" her abusive relationship. And despite feelings of discomfort, Margaret was able to learn from viewing the depictions of domestic violence in *Big Little Lies*:

It was, um, it was disturbing, I would say disquieting... Yeah, it was very

troubling, but you know at the same time it was, um, like it, it also sort of

helped me understand better the dynamics of domestic violence.

Courtney recalled a similar feeling from watching *Veronica Mars* when she was younger, explaining that the show opened her "eyes to violence, especially, um, violence against women."

In some cases, viewing the depictions of gender violence on television encouraged interviewees to become more engaged with the issue in real life. This was particularly true for Whitney, who discussed *Gossip Girl* at length with her friends as part of a recent re-watch:

It has brought up conversations of, well, what would we do or how would

we support people if this is something we saw? Like, what are resources in

[our city] we could direct women to? Like I also think with work like how

could I direct, you know, students or colleagues I'm working with?

Lucy talked about *Handmaid's Tale* with her friends, too, because she felt that it "is a woman's issue," and "because it was political it kind of like encroached that like polite talking area, like we *could* talk about it in public." These examples begin to elucidate some of the ways in which participants think and talk about depictions of gender violence outside of the television context and in a real world context.

4.5   Evaluating the Depictions

Participants reflected on how representative the programs containing depictions of gender violence were compared to real life and evaluated the depictions on what they determined was realistic, unrealistic, and glamorized in the shows.

4.5.1   Realistic Aspects

Overall, the women interviewed generally believe that the depictions of the physical acts of violence are realistic compared to gender violence in the real world, both in regard to the frequency of the acts and the ways in which the physical behaviors are shown. Even if the interviewee did not disclose having personal experience with gender violence, most were able to refer to news stories and/or experiences that their peers have had. Elaine was particularly moved by a scene in *Big Little Lies*, and she remembered thinking in the moment, "like wow they're really, really going for it here, they're not holding back on showing, you know, what, what domestic violence really looks like." Clarice, in discussing the obsessive stalking behavior from the main character in *You*, recalled an incident that happened during the past year in her city:

I would say *You* is definitely somewhat realistic... This man finding her until

he tries to run into her, I'm sure people do that, like yes, no they definitely

do that like that girl at [a local salon], like he found her online and then three

months later showed up at her workplace... and then basically forced to be

able to talk to her. Like people do this shit. Men do this shit!

Daisy explained that though "nothing bad has ever happened" to her, that she has a lot of

friends and that makes the scenes feel very real because she "can't help but start to picture

maybe [her] friend in that situation," and that it is awful.

There were participants who thought that other elements were related to the acts of

gender violence were realistic as well, such as Jodi who believed that "the way the rape

was handled, or like the lack of reporting of the rape in *13 Reasons Why* is very

representative of what it's like in the real world." Olive felt the same way, stating that "it's

realistic that a lot of times women don't go forward." Vicki and Margaret both described

the victim-blaming depicted in the programs as realistic and as something that occurs in

the real world, and Margaret also thought that *Big Little Lies* did a good job demonstrating

how an abuser controls his partner in their relationship.

Even in shows that involve fantastical elements or worlds different than our own,

interviewees still felt the violence itself or at least the motivation behind the violence to be

realistic. Clarice had watched both *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood* which both depict

male abusers who are vampires. She still considered those situations to be similar to the

real world because "a dude would still have his hand" around someone's neck "whether

he's super strong or not," and that ultimately if a man "wanted to be with someone" then

he would do "everything in his power to keep her with him," regardless of human or

inhuman capability. Concerning women being killed in *Game of Thrones*, Lucy felt that was realistic despite the fantasy and medieval-like setting:

> But if anything it kind of grounded that whole character arc in reality for me. I was like no, there are people who are violent for the sake of violence, like, there is no explaining it... it reminds me that this isn't just a TV death, there are women who were and are going to be killed in much the same circumstances.

Lucy succinctly summarized at the end of our discussion that "you can put that in any kind of environment and maybe the same problems will still crop up," insinuating that the gender dynamics and misogyny that contribute to gender violence in those settings mirrors gender dynamics and misogyny in other settings – both realistic and fantastic – as well.

4.5.2   Unrealistic Aspects

Though participants largely felt that the physical depictions of gender violence were realistic, there were a handful of other related aspects that they felt were unrealistic or fell short. The biggest complaint involved how quickly characters emotionally heal from their experiences in the shows, such as this observation from Whitney:

> I don't feel like it is [realistic] 'cause I feel like when I, some of the scenes are shows I keep coming back to, in terms of gender violence, I feel like it, that plot, that part of the plot or that subject or topic lasts for like an episode and then the character moves on or we're into a new storyline. Whereas we

know that, like the collective we, know that, you know, experiencing trauma

is not going to go away in 60 minutes.

Shelly felt similarly and described that we usually do not see the characters "doing the nitty gritty work" that "everyday people" do to heal and become stronger after trauma. She explained that "it's over in the television world in an hour and a half or whatever… but when in real life it takes, it can take months and years."

Vicki had a critique that was specific to the teen shows *The Vampire Diaries* and *Gossip Girl*. In both of those shows, primary male characters (i.e. Damon Salvatore and Chuck Bass respectively) either rape or attempt to rape other primary characters in the first seasons, yet the other characters, including the victims, remain friendly with them throughout the rest of the series. Vicki described why she felt this was unrealistic:

Just thinking about what somebody put you through and then you're like oh

yeah that's fine, and not only that but actually becoming friends with them

later on, um, that is a little far-fetched to me.

Della and Daisy generally felt that shows depicting gender violence overestimate or show too often victims getting retribution for what has been done to them. Daisy elaborated that "there are just so many things that work against people depending on the situation," and that "the statistics are terrible for victims" regarding "filing a police report or trying to do a lawsuit." And in Della's words, "I don't think people get the justice they actually deserve," and that she "had friends who have tried and they've tried and tried and at the end of the day they just lose." Ultimately, it seems that the knowledge of real-life statistics

about gender violence outweigh any feelings of hope or satisfaction that television depictions of victims getting justice can provide.

4.5.3   Glamorized Aspects

There were four interviewees who felt that some of the portrayals on television glamorize or romanticize gender violence. Clarice, like Vicki, had complaints specifically about the shows *The Vampire Diaries* and *Gossip Girl*, and how the characters Damon and Chuck engage in bad behaviors but are still major love interests. She described the dynamic between them and their female counterparts in the shows as follows:

> Yep, I would say it portrays it very differently... It's very sexy... It's meant
>
> to be sexy like ooh I have control over you, like (laughs) like I don't know
>
> how else to put words to that, but that's kind of how it is.

Margaret reflected on the fact that the characters in *Big Little Lies* are "generally beautiful people made up to look even more beautiful than they are in real life," and that the characters in that show are financially well-off. She believes that "real life" domestic violence is "most just like day in day out terrorism" and that she does not "think it's one bit glamorous."

Both Courtney and Whitney reflected more on the structure of the television shows and how they are made than they content. Whitney explained that "in some cases" gender violence "feels really romanticized" or dramatized in that it functions to "build up to the next scene," comparing that to real life where gender violence is "not purposeful" and is "really harmful." Courtney's interpretation of gender violence on television is that it has to be made palatable for audiences to actually be able to watch it:

I would say that pretty much all shows have at least glamorized or touched

up, um, violence in some way to make it more friendly for TV or

consumable really... I can't imagine that, um, if somebody were to be raped,

there was, there would be like a nice soundtrack in the background and just

feeling nothing and like have the perfect lighting and, um, I guess a perfectly

clean bedroom where it takes place or, um, you know, the perfect like date

with your boyfriend leading up to it.

Additionally, Courtney speculated that the glamorization "could be really damaging for people who have gone through that to see." These reflections from the participants about the aesthetic and narrative choices of gender violence on television imply that by making violence approachable and purposeful, shows may also be undermining the seriousness and tragedy of the types of violence in real life, which could in turn negatively impact viewers who have experienced gender violence themselves. But despite the presence of unrealistic and glamorized aspects in the shows, the women who were interviewed were able to make associations between the television characters and narratives with people and stories from real life.

4.6   Connecting Television to Society

Often when discussing the scenes of gender violence in these shows, the interviewees were able to make several connections between how gender and discourse about gender-based violence functioned within the shows to how it functions in our sociocultural and political contexts. Some of the women drew direct connections between what or who they saw on television to real life people and events. For example, Lucy compared Serena Joy in *Handmaid's Tale* to Ben Shapiro's sister, Abby Shapiro, describing her as "an activist

against women, against feminism, and for traditional womanhood – whatever that means." Also related to American politics, in discussing victim-blaming and victims not being believed, Olive was reminded of the cross-examination of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford during Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing. And as these conversations with the interviewees took place in March 2021, there was quite a bit of press and social media discussion about the recent murder of Sarah Everard in London when I spoke with Elaine. She described that TV and media are "kind of a catch 22 these days" because it can make you "more informed, but then again, that could also make you more fearful."

In addition to making specific connections, a lot of the women described broader connections about gender dynamics in the shows to gender dynamics in society. Lucy listed some complicated questions that were tackled in newer seasons of *Handmaid's Tale*, including questions about monogamy, how men were treating women, and how women were treating other women. Lucy said this made her "feel anxious" in that:

> And I was like this is, this is like, it was putting like uh, almost like a twisted
> version of the working woman's burden on top of the existing like fabric of
> the show. Um, this whole idea of like what is a woman anyway, like what
> if we're wrong too?

In a similar vein, Olive detailed some of the events that happen in *You* and how they are a metaphor for real-life gender roles or expectations:

> I mean, with *You*, you just see how he literally traps women in a box. And
> that just goes on so many dimensions of like women are expected to fit in a

box and he's going to force them into that box. Um, I think a lot can be said for that metaphor and the actual scenes that came from that.

Margaret made connections between "the brooding, dark, mercurial, unpredictable male" archetype and the "total bullshit lie women have been fed" that "with enough love" you can take a "mean, nasty man" and make him good. And in Erica's words, the depictions in these shows "demonstrate like a masculine power over the women," and "these gender roles are still very alive and well."

There were a few interviewees who thought that interacting with this content on television directly correlated with talking about or engaging with these issues in real life. For Lucy, this was sometimes a cause of stress and she described finishing *Handmaid's Tale* as something that is on her "to-do list." She compared it to a recurring element in the show *Insecure* where black characters feel the need to watch a program they do not like because it is "one of those cheesy like… slave/plantation" stories and that "they feel obligated to watch something about blackness even if it's not good." In comparing this to *Handmaid's Tale*, she elaborated:

And I think, to an extent, like a lot of women feel that way about *Handmaid's Tale*, like we don't enjoy it necessarily, um it stresses us out, it's, it's a little too close for comfort… but at the same time like there's like this weird what if we don't watch it, then does it mean women's stories aren't being told, does that mean I'm not aware of issues, there's this feeling that you have to somehow be watching the TV show to somehow be doing something about the topics the TV show touches on.

Lucy added that additionally "as women we also feel obligated"' to hearing out opinions, that "we should be the ones to spread" the discussions and "we should be the ones to bring it up with our friends and family," an obligation that leads to resentment in her case.

Some believe that the depictions of gender violence on television do serve to open up more discussion of the issue out in the world, at least. Margaret thought that *Big Little Lies* "definitely serves a function" because "it's good to bring domestic violence out into the open where it can be talked about and it's not just a shameful secret." Olive shared a similar sentiment about how showing depictions of gender violence on television "normalizes talking about it," and Erica also elaborated on the topic:

> In a way I feel like our society has been so hidden behind these closed doors
> of like oh this shit doesn't happen because I've never seen it… but I think
> actually like seeing it play out in front of you in the shows, um, makes it
> more real for the viewers to connect with, to understand, to not be so victim-
> blaming.

Since these stories are depicted on television and likely will continue to be, Whitney feels that "if it's going to be on TV, like let's make it a way to make a better place and make better humans out of the viewers." Whitney and the other participants all offered comments or suggestions that could go toward achieving the goal of making television better, and those ideas are discussed in detail in the following section.

4.7 Improving Television

All of the participants offered their opinions on what television is currently doing well in depicting gender violence and suggestions on what television can improve on or

what they would like to see in the future. Erica thinks that television has been doing well showing the different types and variety of abuse, and Daisy felt okay about there being graphic depictions of gender violence on HBO because HBO is known for pushing boundaries and children cannot access it as easily. Olive, Whitney, and Elaine all appreciated shows that offered resources including websites and phone numbers to organizations that could help people affected by the depictions or who are going through similar events in their own lives, and all agree that television should continue to do that and do it more often.

The most frequent desire for change was for television to show the entire process of experiencing and processing trauma – not just the moments of violence themselves – and to show the survivors healing. Shelly explained that since television is a "visual medium," shows "need to do more showing, less telling that a character is okay." Another common desire was for narratives to hold abusers accountable and depict consequences for them. Della, Vicki, and Whitney all discussed this in relation to the teen shows *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, and particularly the characters Chuck and Damon respectively. Vicki stated that "if you do want to show they have changed, you need to show the consequences of their actions as well," and Whitney thought that having the characters be held accountable could "help to just change culture."

The participants who had watched the drama *13 Reasons Why* were very concerned about the teen audiences watching that show. Daisy feels "like the topics of *13 Reasons Why*" are "too heavy for an adolescent mind to understand and to kind of separate reality from not." Jodi initially stated that she thinks the show should never have been made, but did offer some practical advice for how she would make it better:

I think since it's a young teen audience I think we can break the fourth wall,

we can sort of you know tell them hey, this is bad, this has had a negative

effect on a lot of people, this is toxic behavior don't do this.

Relatedly, Della and Whitney think that television needs to reconsider its ratings system, and also keep in mind that just because a mature rating is assigned to a show does not mean that younger audiences will not be watching. These concerns demonstrate a third-person effect as these participants were solely concerned with teenage audiences and were not concerned with what effects the show may have on themselves or their own understandings.

Vicki and Erica thought that in a lot of instances the violence could be toned down and did not need to be so graphic, and Whitney and Elaine both believe that television could do a better job with content or trigger warnings at the beginning of shows. Elaine recalled the scene from *Game of Thrones* in which the "character Sansa Stark gets brutally raped," and that she does not remember there being a content warning for that episode. She described it as being "purely for shock value" and that "it was disgusting."

Finally, an overarching request involved more representation in the industry and more diversity in the writers rooms, though it was not clear if any of the interviewees had specific knowledge about the people involved with the creation for any of the shows discussed or if they were basing this request off of an assumption. For most of the participants, they were specifically concerned with female representation, but Shelly called for more LGBTQ representation as well:

I mean one of the things that, as a trans woman that I feel like I hear a lot about but I don't see a lot in entertainment in general is violence specifically against trans women… I think that there are some avenues and some opportunities for creators to showcase this and we need to bring more attention to it… but you know violence against trans women or just LGBTQ people in general, that's something that television needs to tackle at some point.

Shelly went on to say that "the people who can make" these shows the best are the "people who experience this every single day."

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The participants in this study provided valuable insights about how they engage with television drama series that depict gender violence and made thoughtful connections to how they see the shows fitting within a broader, sociopolitical context. The results show that viewers usually select which programs they are going to watch based on genre, word of mouth, and/or algorithmic recommendations, but that they continue watching the shows because they become absorbed into the plot, emotionally reacting to the content and feeling a strong desire to know what is going to happen next.

There were three primary types of individual-level effects that were apparent: 1) therapeutic benefits, 2) a sense of perceived risk and fear, and 3) the development of appreciation and understanding. In addition to these individual effects, the participants evaluated the depictions of gender violence compared to gender violence in real life. Generally, the women thought that the actual physical violence shown was realistic, along with the lack of reporting of rape and the prevalence of victim-blaming in society. However, the shows were perceived as unrealistic in the way that the aftermath of gender violence is portrayed. This included that they did not normally get to see the characters go through their healing process and that more often than not victims do not get the justice they deserved. There were also some aspects that participants thought were glamorized compared to real life: practically speaking, the violence could not be presented as so extreme that audiences would not want to watch, so there is often music in the background, nice lighting, clean bedrooms, and more to make it more approachable for viewers, and in some shows the control over other characters was presented as sexy or desirable. The participants were able to make direct connections by characters and events on television

with people and events in the real world, including political figures and recent crimes. Though some felt they were almost obligated to watch since the shows deal with issues relevant to them, a number of interviewees believe that talking about gender violence on television makes it easier to discuss the issue in real life. There are several theoretical and practical implications from these results that will be discussed in the following sections, including practical implications that were brought up in conversation by the interviewees themselves.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Even though this study did not directly test for or measure any concepts or theories, the responses from the participants do correlate with several aspects of the following: transportation, therapeutic catharsis, resonance and perceived risk, and eudaimonic gratifications. The viewers interviewed all experienced emotional responses to the programs they watched, and some even experienced physical reactions. Many described an urge or a need to know what was going to happen next, which is often what prompted them to keep watching even if some of the depictions were upsetting. Additionally, the participants continued thinking about the shows even after they were finished watching and would think about and talk about them further with their peers, indicating lasting emotional effects and continued processing of the narrative content in the programs. These are the main reasons that suggest transportation occurs for viewers of television series with depictions of gender violence, but the theme of immersion and involvement continues throughout the other results, too.

The therapeutic benefits were less common, but there were a few participants whose responses add evidence to the case for therapeutic catharsis in media studies, two of which

disclosed they had direct, personal experience with gender violence. One of those participants reported positive feelings at the end of *Big Little Lies* and described it as "therapy," which lines up with Aristotle's belief that catharsis occurs when the story reaches a resolution that feels satisfying to the viewer (Gentile, 2003). Looking back at Freud's three steps of therapeutic change (Bohart, 1980), participant responses indicate that the three steps did occur for them: insights came in the form of new perspectives and seeing the issue in a different light, emotional reliving occurred when participants felt they were "put back" into traumatic situations, and working through happened through discussions with friends. These women also felt empathy and pity toward the characters in the shows, which comes up again later in the discussion of eudaimonic gratifications.

There were some individual effects that were perhaps more negative, though, including the presence of fear and perceived risk. For several participants, the depictions of gender violence reinforced or heightened feelings of fear, including the fear of being alone. Setting was an important aspect to this: one participant recalled a rape scene that happened in a parking garage and described feeling fearful in that type of space, and another participant recounted scenes of date rape on a college campus that felt more salient to her now that she is also a college student who lives on campus. In all of the cases mentioned regarding risk and fear, the victims of the violence were women. This fact about the gender of the characters being the same as the gender of those interviewed for this study, combined with the new salience regarding the setting for the college student participant, affirms the effect of resonance or the double dose effect (Gerbner, 1998; Shrum & Bischak, 2001), and justifies further exploration of resonance with serial dramas. Several participants also perceived themselves to be at risk of being victims of gender violence and

related issues such as victim-blaming, explaining that if it can happen to these characters on television, it can definitely happen to them, too.

Finally, the majority of the participants described affective and cognitive responses that relate to the ones included in the explication of appreciation and eudaimonic gratifications (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Raney et al., 2020), including empathy for the characters, the presence of mixed affective responses, developing a greater understanding of the issues, engaging with the issues more thoughtfully, and the appreciation of depictions of the human experience. These findings suggest that eudaimonic gratifications are indeed obtained by watching series with depictions of gender violence, though I did not find much in the way of some of the more positive responses like hope and elevation and that should be explored further in future research. It could be that the responses of hope and elevation are usually achieved when an issue is considered fully resolved, but given that the participants felt that television shows usually do not show the healing process for characters, that resolution is never quite fully realized. Additionally, the structure of serial television and the number of hours spent with the characters functioned to make the viewers develop empathy for the characters over time, and that empathy ended up being an important component for both therapeutic catharsis and eudaimonic gratification, which is a connection that should be examined in future research as well.

5.2   Practical Implications

The interviewees offered a number of practical implications for the television industry and creators that I agree with and will briefly restate here. Though they generally felt that the physical depictions of the moments of gender violence were realistic, quite a few participants expressed a desire to see more of the healing process for victims of gender

violence in an effort to make that aspect of trauma more realistic. Participants also would like to see more accountability and consequences shown for abusers, especially if they are to remain primary characters in the show like with Damon Salvatore and Chuck Bass in *The Vampire Diaries* and *Gossip Girl* respectively. The results show that these women felt the depictions of gender violence on television can open up conversations about gender violence in real life, so it is logical that they would also wish for these aspects of the programs to be more realistic in an effort to better inform discussions. Some of the viewers showed concern toward teen audiences and suggested that television shows either tone down the violence or reconsider their ratings, and in a similar vein, a few participants would like to see more content or trigger warnings at the beginning of shows as well. Finally, one participant opened up about wanting to see more transgender and LGBTQ representation in these types of programs.

In addition to the suggestions offered by the participants, I would like to add a few practical implications myself. Television has the ability to critique rape myths and push back against acceptance of gender-based violence, however, oftentimes it feels that attempted critique falls short and in those situations the depictions serve only to perpetuate rape myths and acceptance. To make that critique more explicit, I think it would be worth having the characters openly question and push back against rape myths and build that into the dialogue instead of relying on a more implicit critique within character actions and plot development. The participants' desires to see more accountability and more healing suggest that more explicit plots around gender violence would be welcome and would not hinder their enjoyment of the shows. Similarly, some programs such as *Euphoria* offer interviews with the actors and creators immediately following the episodes, and those are

great spaces to unpack the plot, characters' actions, and the decisions that were made in putting the show together. If adding in the accountability and/or healing into the programs is not feasible, then adding more interviews and extra content could be a way to explore how gender violence impacts other aspects of the narrative, and it can also be a space for direct calls to action by sharing resources and explaining the real-world implications of the issues depicted.

The final practical implication I would like to discuss is how these programs can be used in a therapeutic way. Given that therapeutic benefits did occur for some of the participants, it seems that these programs can be used intentionally as tools to help those who have experienced gender violence, or alternatively help friends and family of survivors better understand what they went through. The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) has tweeted screenshots and quotes from *Big Little Lies* as well as meaningful reflections from the actors in the show (2017-19, twitter.com/nnedv), which is another way to continue the conversation and increase understanding for viewers. As more television content intertwines with movements in the real world, such as the use of handmaid costumes for women's marches or the incorporation of the #MeToo movement into new dramas like *The Morning Show*, I believe this type of dialogue and interaction will be increasingly important and desired by viewers.

5.3   Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study was very much exploratory in nature and future research could benefit from a narrower scope or the addition of content analyses that thoroughly examine the depictions of gender violence in the shows that the participants reported watching; the results for this paper relied on participants' descriptions of the scenes that had a lasting impression or

stood out to them. The sampling methods resulted in a sample that was not representative of the population and was more diverse than the current demographics of the state I conducted the research in. Due to the fact I posted the recruitment script on my personal social media accounts, the volunteers for the study likely more closely aligned with my personal viewpoints and did not drastically differ in opinion about scenes of gender violence compared to my personal opinions; therefore, future research into female audiences of shows with depictions of gender violence could benefit from more rigid sampling methods. It could also be interesting to interview different populations including audiences who have personal experience with violence to further explore therapeutic catharsis and resonance, or male audiences to see if eudaimonic gratifications occur for them as well. Finally, this study did not directly test for or measure any of the theories or concepts mentioned and this topic should certainly be explored using quantitative or mixed methods in the future as well.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Female viewers of television drama series with depictions of gender violence were interviewed for this study and they discussed why they watch these programs, the individual effects that the portrayals of gender violence have on them, and the connections they made between the television portrayals and gender violence in our society. The women reported selecting shows based on their genre, from peer recommendations, or because the algorithm pushed it to them, but kept watching due to experiences that echo the process of transportation into the narrative. Therapeutic catharsis appeared to be present for a few of the participants, which adds value and justification for the further exploration of a different type of catharsis in media effects research. More of the participants also reported feelings of fear and perceived risk, such as suggested with resonance, and multiple affective and cognitive responses that relate to appreciation and eudaimonic gratifications. Their evaluations of the depictions as realistic, unrealistic, and glamorized contributed to how they connected the television events with real-life discussions of gender violence, which places some additional pressure on television to be more cognizant and intentional with how they are depicting violence against women. Expanding knowledge on audience concerns and inviting more female audiences to share their opinions can certainly help directors, writers, and producers be more sensitive toward the complexities of the issue, which is important due to just how pervasive gender violence is in society and that they are presenting these stories of trauma to people who may have experienced trauma themselves. The women who participated in this research clearly engaged with the content far beyond a superficial level and had very articulate thoughts about the programs they watch. My hope is that their thoughts are taken with considerable weight and that their voices, and

more voices, are invited to be heard in detail in the future. Especially considering that we are now in a post-#MeToo movement era, television should continue to adapt and be more socially conscious in order to keep up with and help construct positive societal views.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE

[Introduction]

I want to begin by saying thank you for volunteering to be a part of this study. I am a graduate student in Communication, and I am currently working on researching depictions of gender-based violence on television and how those programs affect societal perceptions of gender violence. You were asked to meet today because you have indicated that you have watched at least one full season of a television program with depictions of gender violence, and I would like to know what opinions you have about those programs, including what scenes resonated with you and why. This conversation is being audio recorded so I can focus on the conversation and not have to worry about taking notes while you are talking, but I do want to assure you that your name or any other identifying information will not be used in the transcript or in the final research paper. If you wish to pause or stop our discussion at any time, please let me know. You can skip any question that you want to. Before we get started, did you have a chance to read the informed consent form that I emailed to you? [*Go over form, ask if they have any questions*]. With that information, do you consent to participate in this study?

[Interview portion]

Okay, I have just a few standard background questions to get out of the way really quick before we start talking about television.

    (1) What is your race/ethnicity?

    (2) How old are you?

(3) What is your sexuality?

Great, thanks for answering those. To start off our discussion, I would like to get a general understanding of what your television viewing habits are. **(4) How do you typically decide what TV shows you are going to watch?**

    (5) When you watch television, do you usually give it your full attention, or do you multitask while you watch?

        Follow-up if combination of both: What are some reasons you may give full attention to one program and multitask during another? For example, are there certain types or genres of shows that warrant more of your attention?

    (6) Would you consider yourself a binge-watcher?

    If yes: What shows have you binge-watched?

    If yes: What makes you decide to binge watch a show?

Great, let's talk specifically about drama series now. In television, dramas are shows that are more serious in tone as opposed to being mostly comedic or humorous. **(7) What are some of your favorite shows to watch that fall into the drama genre, specifically fictional dramas?**

    (8) What is it that you like about those shows?

    (9) Do you find the characters to be relatable?

        If yes: Any characters in particular?

        If no: Why not?

Now we are going to talk about fictional drama series that have depictions of gender violence in them. Gender violence may include sexual assault, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or dating violence. These terms encompass acts including physical behaviors such as pushing/shoving/hitting, rape, and/or stalking. Additionally, these terms can include verbal and psychological abuse such as making threats, controlling behavior, financial abuse like stealing, hiding, or controlling money, and also gaslighting, which is a way of manipulating someone into questioning their own sanity. **(10) Are there any particular shows that you recall watching that have depictions of gender violence?**

(11) Are there any particular scenes you recall that stood out to you, or resonated with you?

> *If yes*: Can you describe the scene(s)?
>
> *If yes*: What impact did that scene have on you, or how did it resonate with you exactly?
>
> *If no:* You mentioned that you watched _____. Do you remember the scene where _____?
>
> > *If you do remember*, why?
> >
> > *If you don't remember*, why do you think that scene didn't stay with you or stick out in your mind?
> >
> > Do you consider that to be a depiction of gender violence? Why or why not?

(12) How does watching those shows make you feel?

> *If sadness*: Have you ever cried during or after a scene with a depiction of gender violence?
>
> > *If yes*: Can you recall a particular scene that made you cry?

If yes: What elements of that scene do you think brought about such a strong emotional reaction from you? (*If they need further info on question*: Was it the acting, the way the scene was filmed, the music?)

If yes: How did you feel after crying?

If no: Why not?

    If <u>anger</u>: Can you recall a particular scene that made you angry?

If yes: What about that scene made you angry? (*If they need further info on question:* Did you feel it was unfair to the characters, did not accurately represent what happens in real life, was it something about the choices they made filming?)

If yes: Is there anything you do to make yourself feel better if a scene makes you angry?

If not: Why not?

    If <u>shock</u>: Can you recall a particular scene that made you shocked?

If yes: What about that scene shocked you? (*If they need further info on question:* Was it how graphic the violent act was, or did it have to do more with music or the plot?)

If yes: Did being shocked make watching the show more enjoyable or more upsetting for you?

If no: Why not?

    If <u>neutral</u>: Why do you think these shows didn't have much of an effect on you?

(13) Have you ever had to stop watching a show or fast forward through a scene because it was too upsetting for you to watch?

If yes: Can you provide an example?

If yes: What about the show or the scene was upsetting for you?

Thank you for opening up about your opinions and feelings about those scenes. Now that we've discussed how you personally feel, I'd like to ask you **(14) if you think the various depictions and scenes of gender violence on television are representative of gender violence in the real world?**

If they <u>are</u> realistic: Are there any specific plot lines or characters who you consider to be realistic?

    Follow-up: What makes them so realistic exactly?

If they are <u>not</u> realistic: Why do you think the scenes are not representative of the real world?

    Follow-up: What do you think television creators and/or actors could do to make the shows more realistic?

Awesome, I think you have some valuable insights into these programs. My final set of questions involves how you talk about these shows with your peers and in what way, so, **(15) do you ever talk about some of the scenes depicting gender violence with either your friends or your family?**

    If yes: What do you talk about specifically?

    Do your discussions ever turn into debates?

        If yes: What are the debates about?

        Can you give me a specific example of one?

If no: Why don't you discuss those shows or scenes?

(16) Okay, what about social media? Do you ever make posts or reply to discussions about any of the shows we discussed?

      If yes: What platform(s) do you use to discuss the programs?

            Do you ever argue with people online about the shows? Why?

Have you ever used hashtags to connect with other people regarding the content of these shows?

      If yes: What hashtags have you used, and what has your experience with them been like?

      If no: Why don't you use social media to talk about them?

[Wrap-up]

Well, those are all of the questions I had for you today! (17) Before we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to discuss that we didn't have a chance to talk about earlier?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today about these topics. I know talking about gender violence can sometimes be difficult, so I will be sending you a sheet that lists some of the resources on campus and in Lexington that are available to you. Please feel free to email me with any more questions or concerns, and I hope you have a good rest of your day!

APPENDIX 2. CODEBOOK

First-Level Codes

Name of Code	Short Definition	Full Definition	Example Quotes
Algorithm	Algorithmic recommendations	Show recommendations that come up from the algorithm on a streaming service or platform, such as Netflix's or Hulu's "recommended for you" sections	"Just kind of what's, typically what's shown to me through the streaming things I use, so what it recommends or what friends have suggested to me." (Clarice)
Audience	Concerns or considerations about the audience	Who is watching the show and/or concerns about that particular audience being exposed to certain types of programming	"I mean you have to consider that there are a lot of victims out there - one in four women, right? - so, I think that it's insensitive overall to make a comment like that." (Daisy) "Um, because it excuses so much behavior that if you're a young person watching that you think it's okay if it happens or it's not that big a deal when it obviously has traumatizing effects and has, um, lasting implications for both sides, both parties." (Olive)
Audio	Audio components of the program	Audio elements of the program including music, sound effects, and noises or dialogue made by the actors	"Like the sounds in the back and like, I don't know how to explain it, like the grunting and yelling part of it. Like you can hear the actors sound like they're in a lot of pain and I think that's, that was the most emotionally triggering part of it." (Della)
Change Desired	Hopes or desired changes	What changes the interviewee would like to be made in the future, either regarding the content of programs themselves, or aspects about the industry (i.e. who is in the writing room, or who is producing)	"I mean one of the things that, as a trans woman I feel like I hear a lot about but I don't see a lot in entertainment in general is violence specifically against trans women. And, while that is obviously not as widespread as say you know domestic violence has been portrayed and things like that, I think there are some avenues and opportunities for creators

			to sort of step up and say we need to, this is a real problem, we need to showcase this and we need to bring more attention to it... violence against trans women or just LGBTQ people in general, that's something that television needs to tackle at some point." (Shelly)
Co-viewing	Viewing with another person	Situations where the interviewee watched a program with another person or multiple people in the same physical space	"My boyfriend and I binge-watched *You* together." (Jodi) "You know, my husband watched both of those shows with me. And I think talking with him about it, he, it was actually really surprising just how well he was able to understand sort of a woman's perspective of like what was happening." (Erica)
Consequence	Consequences (or lack thereof) for characters	Whether or not characters are shown as receiving consequences for negative actions (particularly committing acts of gender violence), or a desire to see characters face consequences for their actions or make some sort of retribution	"I think uh if you show such characters and if you want to show that they have changed, you need to show the consequences of their actions as well. Uh, like I feel like that's not done enough." (Vicki)
Disclaimer	Disclaimers provided to another person	When somebody who has seen an episode or show offers a disclaimer or warning about the content to a potential viewer	"I'm like year it is really good, there is a lot of rape though. Like, and that would probably be as far as I go most of the time unless they really pressed me on it. But um, yeah I did almost find myself thinking that it was just like, it was just like a disclaimer, it wasn't necessarily but like some of those scenes were a lot." (Lucy)
Educational	When a show serves an educational purpose or informs	The show provides knowledge or insight into an issue and/or contributes to further understanding or empathy towards a problem; can also include practical knowledge	"Maybe it does say something, maybe it does, like *Big Little Lies* maybe someone who hasn't been abused watches it and they're like oh my gosh this is what this looks like when my friend said she needed to leave her husband because this happened, this is

			what this looked like." (Clarice) "I find that like that is definitely something that, um, can be educational for people because I feel like as it is, I don't feel like people are very well-versed, aware, whatever you want to call it about the ins and outs of, um, transgender abuse, what they've gone through... the lived experiences of these people are so underrepresented that, I mean that was like another reason that I was like, totally in love with the show." (Erica) "'Cause I definitely walk with like my keys between my hands when I'm walking alone at night. And I don't know who taught me that. So maybe it was a show, maybe it was, I don't think my parents were ever like sat me down and was like, okay, this is what you need to do. Um, so I guess it was the media." (Olive)
Emotional Reaction	Felt an emotional response due to a depiction or a scene	Interviewee reports feeling emotional either during and/or after watching a depiction of gender violence (i.e. sadness, anger, stress, shock)	"And another thing that makes me angry, um, and a lot of shows depict that and that's also true for real life is how other people who should be supporting the victim or the survivor um are actually casting blame on them or telling them to move on... it would be fair to say it almost makes my blood boil anytime anybody says move on or it might be something that you did." (Vicki)
Empathy	Empathy for a character	Understanding or relating to the feelings or experiences that a character has	"Because you grow to care about these characters, um, whether they have conflict in their life, within themselves, whatever, I mean you grow to care about them, so when you see something traumatic happen to them I feel like it's teaching the people to be a little bit more defensive and

			caring about you know what has happened to these people." (Erica)
Enjoyment	Feelings of fun or enjoyment while viewing a show	Descriptions of the viewing experience for a show or shows as fun, enjoyable, and/or entertaining	"I think that *You* is um, I think that we share the same opinions about *You*, I mean neither or us think that it's romantic. We think it's fun to watch, though." (Jodi)
Fear	Fear as a result of TV viewing	Instances of increased fear or reinforced fears as a result of watching depictions of gender violence on television; can include specific concerns such as settings where violence may occur, or more abstract or broad fears like being alone or perceiving self to be at risk	"Each of those were like incidents where they were alone, um, so like, you know, being, I guess tossed around. And, um, so I mean, I think it really stuck with me because it was like instilling the fear of being alone." (Erica) "Oh my gosh. I was so scared to like go out at night, even though I was a kid essentially just playing outside at nighttime, but I still think about it like to this day, like if I'm walking on campus now at night, I'll think about season two of *Veronica Mars* where there's a series of rapes on campus." (Courtney)
GBV Discourse	Discourse about gender-based violence in the real world	The way that gender-based violence is talked about in the real world, including whether it is talked about or not and the language used to talk about it	"I think to some extent it was conscious because like um we don't consider discussions of gender-based violence like real or fictional to be polite conversation topics." (Lucy) "In a way I feel like our society has been so hidden behind these closed doors of like oh this shit doesn't happen because I've never seen it... but I think actually like seeing it play out in front of you in the shows, um, makes it more real for the viewers to connect with, to understand, to not be so victim-blaming." (Erica)
Gender Dynamics	Gender roles or dynamics between genders	Descriptions of what is considered as traditional or archetypal gender roles, or discussions about the	"And then there's this additional element I think as women we also feel obligated to do those kinds of things. We're like beholden to if someone has

		dynamics of power and control between genders; can include about how this functions within the show, or more broadly, how the depictions in the show relate to gender roles and dynamics in the real world	an opinion, we should hear them out. And not only that, if it's a good opinion we should be the ones to spread it, like we should be the ones to bring it up with our friends and family. Like it, it also brings up these weird feelings of like obligation and also like resentment toward that which adds to my overall resentment of how the show makes me feel." (Lucy) "I would say for the most part it is [realistic], um, just because the majority of what is being depicted within these shows demonstrate like a masculine power over the women... I think that that is still, these gender roles are still very alive and well. Um, you know, it's still being taught... these are still taught behaviors that are sort of expected between relationships." (Erica) "Um, I mean, with You, you just see how he literally traps women in a box. And that just goes on so many dimensions of like women are expected to fit in a box and he's going to force them into that box. Um, I think a lot can be said for that metaphor and the actual scenes that came from that." (Olive)
Genre	Genre of a television program	Descriptions of television program genres or overall tone of the shows	"For the most part as I said before I usually like crime shows or horror shows or mystery, stuff like that." (Vicki)
Glamorization	Glamorized, glorified, or romanticized violence	Interviewee evaluates a depiction of gender violence as glamorized, romanticized, or dramatized compared to what gender violence is actually like in the real world; can relate to who or what is physically shown, the way the show is structured, or	"I think that shows, almost as frightening as it is, it's glamorized almost... And I think in real life, it's more just like day in day out terrorism kind of, you know, it's just, uh, I don't think it's one bit glamorous." (Margaret) "Yep, I would say it portrays it very

			elements of how it is handled narratively or thematically	differently.. It's very sexy.. It's meant to be sexy like ooh I have control over you, like (laughs) like I don't know how else to put words to that, but that's kind of how it is." (Clarice)
				"I would say that pretty much all shows have at least glamorized or touched up, um, violence in some way to make it more friendly for TV or consumable really... I can't imagine that, um, if somebody were to be raped, there was, there would be like a nice soundtrack in the background and just feeling nothing and like have the perfect lighting and, um, I guess a perfectly clean bedroom where it takes place or, um, you know, the perfect like date with your boyfriend leading up to it." (Courtney)
Graphic Violence	Gratuitous, graphic, excessive, or explicit violence	Acts of violence described as being particularly gruesome, visually graphic, excessively violent, or explicit	"I was an avid *Game of Thrones* watcher and I can't remember what season it is, but the, um, character Sansa Stark gets brutally raped and I don't know that there was any kind of content warning or anything. And it was it, *that* was purely for shock value. It was, it was disgusting." (Elaine)
If Them Then Us	If it can happen on TV, it can happen in real life	Feelings that if a character on television can be a victim of gender violence (i.e. well-off characters, beautiful characters, etc.), then it can happen to anyone, not just in television but in real life	"I was just thinking when that was happening like this woman is in a position of power and if she can basically order somebody to kill someone... and this is happening to her, this can happen to her and that person can get away with it, then what about the rest of us?" (Vicki)

"And then you think like it could happen to someone like her with all those resources and she herself was an attorney. And you think about, you know, a woman who doesn't have those kinds of resources, they would be even much more at the mercy, I |

			think of, yeah, victim-blaming." (Margaret)
Lingering Response	Lingering thoughts or feelings after finishing an episode	When emotional or physical responses to television depictions of gender violence last after the viewer has finished watching the episode or series; can include continuing to think about and engage with the content post-viewing	"Um, I think at the end of the, uh, the series it was like a lot of questions. I mean, I immediately tried to interpret instead of just like sitting with the end, you know, it was like, I was quick to trying to see what other people felt about it, because I mean it was just, there was, it was so chaotic." (Erica) "Um, and I think in that sense it disturbs me, even afterward, because it reminds me that this isn't just a TV death, there are women who were and are going to be killed in much the same circumstances." (Lucy)
Morality	Moral evaluations of a character	Moral evaluations of the character or the character's actions, including morally ambiguous characters or characters who are physically attractive but behaviorally unattractive	"I was gonna say that, like Chuck, how he is in the beginning and then by the end you're actually feeling sorry for him and rooting for him. 'Cause he has, he like sexually assaults women all the time and he gets away with it." (Vicki)
Murder	Murder or attempted murder	Descriptions of the murder or intentional murder of a character in a show as the result of or related to gender-based violence	"One from *Game of Thrones* is the death of the character Ros... it actually differed a little from other *Game of Thrones* deaths in that it didn't actually show the moment she died on screen, it just kind of showed us the lead up and then it cut and then it came back to the aftermath of her like dead body... we come back and we see her like speared to death with the crossbow." (Lucy)
Need to Know	Need or desire to know what happens	Interviewee expresses a need or desire to see what else would happen in an episode or series, and this can include binge-watching habits or watching multiple episodes at a time	"Um, I felt like I wanted to go to the end and see what else would happen. I feel like with those shows, like the drama shows, they always make the end, like the end of the episode one big question mark, and that kind of

			makes you want to keep watching just to see what's going to happen." (Della)
Partner Violence	Domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or dating violence	Violence between partners in a romantic relationship, whether the relationship is between married adults, individuals in committed relationships, or individuals who are casually dating; violence can be either physical, verbal, and/or psychological.	"Well, the scenes of Alexander Skarsgård knocking around Nicole Kidman, even though they were handled, as I recall, in kind of an oblique way, that left an impression. And, uh, when she was talking about that to her therapist and her denial of it, I mean, I think like even once she came in with a black eye or something... I mean, there's a lot, there was a lot in that that, um, stuck with me about how people lie to themselves and lie to their friends when they're in a violent relationship like that." (Margaret)
Personal Experience	Personal experience with gender-based violence	Disclosures of direct, personal experience with gender-based violence in real life; can include any of the forms of gender violence that are included in the thesis definition, including but not limited to partner violence, sexual assault, and stalking	"Because I was triggered for the longest time like with [my ex-boyfriend] ... and I'm going to start crying... but it was when I was living with [my former roommate] and I remember there was just one night where I sat downstairs and I just had a mental fucking breakdown, and that was how many years after [we broke up], maybe two? He wasn't in my life... but like I just had a full on mental breakdown, 'cause you realize that other stuff triggers you... I definitely think I feel differently about it because I was abused." (Clarice) "So I guess sort of how I connect, um, maybe with the characters or, um, like I know for example like I really was interested in the *You* series... not only did I flip through the book, um, prior to the show coming out, but it was like I've had my own experiences of being stalked... it's just like that shock value of being put back into a traumatic experience and sort of seeing it in a different light. Um, sometimes, as fucked up as it sounds

			like it's almost like, kind of like a comforting feeling like a familiarity." (Erica)
Physical Reaction	Exhibited a physical response to a depiction or a scene	Interviewee reports having a physical reaction to depictions or scenes of gender violence; this can include bodily reactions (i.e. feeling sick to stomach, crying) and/or verbal reactions (i.e. gasping, screaming)	"When I'm watching TV especially and I'm like giving it my full attention, I'm like actually screaming like, I'm like actually screaming, gasping, um feeling physically shocked." (Lucy) "Kind of made me feel sick for a while... Like sick to my stomach." (Della) "I cover my face a lot when I don't like what's happening, but I don't cover my eyes. Like I just kind of hold my face. Um, I start to fidget maybe a little bit, or I definitely cry. I cry very easily when I see stuff like that." (Daisy)
Plot/Narrative	Structure of the plot or narrative	Descriptions of how the plot or narrative is structured, and the function that that structure serves for the viewer	"Yeah, it's almost like at teaser for getting you interested into the show... I hate that it's portrayed as a character quality of her. It's not, it's, it's not, or it shouldn't be anybody's characteristic or defining fact. Um, I was thinking about this earlier as well actually, but I guess going back to what I said about the stuff shouldn't be pure entertainment, and I think that's what this, this particular depiction in the first episode and then not really touching back onto it until ten episodes later, that's the function of it." (Courtney)
Prior Mood	Viewer's mood prior to watching television	The affective mood or emotional state that the interviewee was in prior to watching television	"I think a large part of whenever I watch these kinds of shows is how I'm feeling at the time... If I'm already on edge and exhausted then if I see something like this it affects me more than probably if I were in a better mood and watching the same scene." (Vicki)

			"Probably a more complicated answer is that depending on what's going on in my life and my mood, I'm not going to watch something that's going to bring me lower." (Daisy)
Realistic	Realistic or representative of real life	Interviewee evaluates a depiction of gender violence as realistic or representative of gender violence in real life; can concern either the physical acts or behaviors of gender violence, or the context in which gender violence occurs or is handled in the narrative	"I don't like that it feels representative of the real world, but I know that the way the rape was handled, or like the lack of reporting of the rape in *13 Reasons Why* is very representative of what it's like in the real world." (Jodi) "But if anything it kind of grounded that whole character arc in reality for me... because it reminds me that this isn't just a TV death, there are women who were and are going to be killed in much the same circumstances." (Lucy) "I would say *You* is definitely somewhat realistic... This man finding her until he tries to run into her, I'm sure people do that, like yes, no they definitely do that like that girl at [a local salon], like he found her online and then three months later showed up at her workplace... and then basically forced to be able to talk to her. Like people do this shit. Men do this shit!" (Clarice)
Relatable	Relatable characters or feeling similar to characters	Characters that are described as relatable to the interviewee; does not imply similarity, nor is it synonymous with empathy; relatable has more to do with character traits than emotions	"I really like that show because it, the main character is a girl who is around my age or could be relatable to me." (Courtney)
Setting	The world or time period a show is set in	The world or time period that a show is set in, including the consideration of fantastical	"I think that, I think the fact that *Game of Thrones* has sort of medieval I guess aesthetic to it makes some people more uh receptive - not receptive - accepted, like they are able

			to accept the uh, the sexual assault and rape a lot more." (Jodi) "Like in the case of *Game of Thrones* I haven't felt the same amount of trauma and something I think about like why that is, and maybe because that short film was more rooted in like the same time period as I'm currently living in... maybe something about it touched on a little bit more of my reality I think that a story about like people in fictional medieval Europe with like dragons." (Lucy) "I think especially now that I'm in college, um, seeing, um, I guess a dorm room where a rape is going to take place kind of hits more home, like more home than me being a kid in my living room watching it with my mom." (Courtney)
		elements or historical elements	
Sexual Assault	Sexual assault or sexual violence	Descriptions of unwanted or forced sexual contact, including groping and rape	"I know in *The Sopranos* one thing that sticks out, and I can't think of the doctor's name off the top of my head... whenever she is raped. Um, and the, you know, that sort of comes out of nowhere. It's very shocking. It's almost, it's a very realistic portrayal." (Shelly) "And then also the, um, the rape of the [Shailene Woodley] character... I remember that too, and how that haunted her. I thought they did a, a good job of depicting how that, you know, was kind of haunting her days and nights and just sort of this, I mean, you really, you did, that show did convey a sense of physical menace in a fairly subtle way." (Margaret)
Stalking	Stalking or being highly obsessive	Stalking or obsessing over someone else; can include physical behaviors such as following the person, and	"Just like the general theme of stalking in *You* is very off-putting to me, um, that someone could be so obsessive and so like behind the

| | | | scenes about it without you knowing that's going on." (Daisy)

"It would just show the main character like masturbating through her window and that guy watching her... He found her on social media and then would constantly figure out where she was and go and like it was almost manipulative." (Della) |
|---|---|---|---|
| over another character | | other behaviors like keeping track of their social media posts | |
| Strong Female Lead | Strong female lead characters | Descriptions of female characters as strong, powerful, inspiring, breaking the mold, or able to overcome hardships | "I do enjoy a strong female lead character that kind of doesn't follow the, the typical tropes that are stereotypes that you see about women in TV. Um, especially with *Killing Eve*, like that's, I enjoyed how kind of messy and imperfect those women were." (Elaine) |
| Television Industry | The business or logistical side of the television industry | Ruminations on how the business, financial aspects, or logistical side of the television industry may impact television programming | "Well, and it also makes me think of like however many thousands of cop drama shows... you could write a book on like formulas of cop dramas and how many of those formulas are based on violence against women, like showing a sex worker just laying dead in a gutter and a police officer standing over her, smoking a cigarette and being like well here's another one." (Elaine) |
| Therapy | Therapy or therapeutic benefits to viewing | Descriptions of the show offering therapeutic benefits to the viewer; could involve making them feel better, helping them process, etc. | "Because I mean I think the thing is when you try to talk to someone specifically about their own dating violence, they are obviously going to be much more resistant, um, defensive, but when you talk about it through media it's so much more easy for them to relate and understand and grow from... They're definitely able to pull it out much easier when it's already sort of been felt and done, you know, by another character." (Erica) |
| Triggering | The triggering of an emotional | Negative emotions or reminders of personal | "I feel like these shows sort of instill that, like very, very, very minor |

	response or memory	experiences that are triggered by depictions of on-screen violence	experienced feeling of PTSD, you know, it's like you are witnessing a traumatic event so it's much more, um, easily you know pulled from your memory than if you were to be told about something." (Erica)
Uncomfortable	Discomfort or feeling uncomfortable	Feeling uncomfortable or experiencing feelings of discomfort while viewing depictions of gender violence on television	"It feels like stressful, like you definitely hold your breath because you realize what's gonna happen, I mean you've seen Perry do this many times before, you know he's going to get physical with her... Like that happens, spousal abuse, domestic abuse definitely happens and it happens a lot unfortunately. So, yeah, it makes me uncomfortable." (Clarice)
Unrealistic	Unrealistic or not representative of real life	Interviewee evaluates a depiction of gender violence as unrealistic compared to gender violence in real life, or that it does not provide a full picture of the issue; can concern either the physical acts or behaviors of gender violence, or the context in which gender violence occurs or is handled in the narrative	"You know, these are generally beautiful people made up to look even more beautiful than they are in real life. And they're not, uh, you know, by and large, nobody in either of those shows were worried that if they left their relationship they wouldn't be able to survive financially... And in real life, I think that just economic pressures and how do I survive if I leave him keep a lot more victims in relationships then you know you usually see on television." (Margaret) "But the whole point was that they were in therapy because of their marriage, and I don't think, I think Perry was smart and he wouldn't have done that, like he wouldn't have put them in therapy because someone's going to see something at some point... and he opened that door up, you know? So I don't think that was kind of how it would play out." (Clarice)
Violence Against Men	Sexual violence against men	Sexual violence that happens to a male character by either male or female perpetrator(s),	"Like in *Euphoria* when that one girl's boyfriend, um, was being assaulted by his fraternity brothers... and, um, you

		including rape, sexual assault, and/or sodomy	know, they, they were in the middle of having sex, so he was already naked. I mean I had to look away, I was like, oh fuck, this is like, so graphic. I mean, it was, it was awful." (Erica)
Visuals	Visual components of the program	Visual elements of the program including character appearance, physical depictions of violence, the camerawork, cinematography, and physical setting	"So I guess the depiction of it kind of in a, in a more serious kind of scary, um, technique, the darkness, um, the very shaky camera work. I thought it depicted in a serious but I guess realistic way as well." (Courtney)
Women's Issues	Sociopolitical issues related to women's lives and experiences	Social and/or political issues that are pertinent to women's lives and experiences; can include the way these issues are depicted in the shows, but also how those depictions relate to women's issues in the real world	"But at the same time like there's like this weird what if we don't watch it, then does it mean women's stories aren't being told, does that mean I'm not aware of issues, there's this feeling that you have to somehow be watching the TV show to somehow be doing something about the topics the TV show touches on." (Lucy) "It's almost like a societal instinct, um, to know about these experiences, know that these things are probably gonna happen to you at one point in your life as a woman." (Courtney)
Word of Mouth	Word of mouth or peer recommendation	Shows that the interviewee heard about through other people either from direct recommendations or through social media or popular press	"That's how I choose to watch most shows is that I've heard someone else say they're really good. " (Elaine)

Second-Level Codes

Name of Code (bold) & Name of Sub-codes	Short Definition	Full Definition	Example Quotes
Evaluation of the Depictions			

Glamorized	Glorified or glamorized depictions of gender violence	Interviewee evaluates a depiction of gender violence as glamorized, romanticized, or dramatized compared to what gender violence is actually like in the real world; can relate to who or what is physically shown, the way the show is structured, or elements of how it is handled narratively or thematically	"I think that shows, almost as frightening as it is, it's glamorized almost... And I think in real life, it's more just like day in day out terrorism kind of, you know, it's just, uh, I don't think it's one bit glamorous." (Margaret) "Yep, I would say it portrays it very differently.. It's very sexy.. It's meant to be sexy like ooh I have control over you, like (laughs) like I don't know how else to put words to that, but that's kind of how it is." (Clarice) "I would say that pretty much all shows have at least glamorized or touched up, um, violence in some way to make it more friendly for TV or consumable really... I can't imagine that, um, if somebody were to be raped, there was, there would be like a nice soundtrack in the background and just feeling nothing and like have the perfect lighting and, um, I guess a perfectly clean bedroom where it takes place or, um, you know, the perfect like date with your boyfriend leading up to it." (Courtney)
Realistic	Realistic or representative of real life	Interviewee evaluates a depiction of gender violence as realistic or representative of gender violence in real life; can concern either the physical acts or behaviors of gender violence, or the context in which gender violence	"But it has [happened] to a lot of my friends and I think that kind of sticks with me too because I can't help but start to picture maybe my friend in that situation. And it just makes it very real... But I also know that shows like that are that's, that's happening somewhere. Um, probably

			occurs or is handled in the narrative	multiple places. So that's kind of where my mind goes when it's a little bit more on the realistic side, like that is awful." (Daisy)
	Unrealistic	Unrealistic or not representative of real life	Interviewee evaluates a depiction of gender violence as unrealistic compared to gender violence in real life, or that it does not provide a full picture of the issue; can concern either the physical acts or behaviors of gender violence, or the context in which gender violence occurs or is handled in the narrative	"It seems like in a lot of television shows these characters who are hurt by gender violence and if their character arc is getting over that and becoming stronger as a result, we usually don't see them doing the nitty gritty work that I feel like everyday people do... it's over in the television world in an hour and a half or whatever. Um, but when in real life it takes, it can take months and years. And I feel like we struggle at least in current television with depicting that, um, and showcasing that people don't just get over it overnight... I feel like some shows are willing to just bring it up when it's convenient." (Shelly) "I don't feel like it is [realistic] 'cause I feel like when I, some of the scenes are shows I keep coming back to, in terms of gender violence, I feel like it, that plot, that part of the plot or that subject or topic lasts for like an episode and then the character moves on or we're into a new storyline. Whereas we know that, like the collective we, know that, you know, experiencing trauma is not going to go away in 60 minutes." (Whitney)

Eudaimonic Gratifications			
Empathy	Empathy for a character	Understanding or relating to the feelings or experiences that a character has	"Because you grow to care about these characters, um, whether they have conflict in their life, within themselves, whatever, I mean you grow to care about them, so when you see something traumatic happen to them I feel like it's teaching the people to be a little bit more defensive and caring about you know what has happened to these people." (Erica)
Engaging w/ Issues	Engagement with social or political issues	Engaging with social or political issues beyond merely viewing them in the show; can include drawing connections with the issues in the show and real life, or seeking out additional content related to the issues	"It has brought up conversations of, well, what would we do or how would we support people if this is something we saw? Like, what are resources in [our city] we could direct women to? Like I also think with work like how could I direct, you know, students or colleagues I'm working with?" (Whitney)
Human Experience	Appreciation or interest in the human experience or human condition	An appreciation or fascination in the human experience, human condition, or human mind and thought processes	"I am constantly thinking about how, how weird it is that I am listening to murder and violence and rapes for, for fun, pretty much. Um, and I want to say it's just because the human mind and the human experience is interesting to me, but this stuff is scary." (Courtney) "I guess it's the drama, but, you know, one thing I am seeing a theme sort of in those is, um, is it like a fascination with violence and crime? Okay so, I don't like bloody gory stuff at all. Like I don't like

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			seeing people shot, but, or beaten up, even though there is some of that in *Big Little Lies*, but the psychology of it I guess I find fascinating." (Margaret)
Mixed Affect	Mixed affective responses	The presence of both positive and negative affective or emotional responses to content	"Well I hate watching [the rape scenes], it's never fun to watch. But I think it was sort of like well there's other good things happening in this episode to make up for it." (Jodi)
Understanding	Developing understanding of an issue	Developing deeper understanding or appreciation of an issue that the interviewee might not have previously had much experience with	"It was, um, it was disturbing, I would say disquieting... Yeah, it was very troubling, but you know at the same time it was, um, like it, it also sort of helped me understand better the dynamics of domestic violence." (Margaret)
Improving Television			
Current Likes	Things television is currently doing well	Things that television is already doing that the interviewee likes or appreciates and would like to see more of	"Here's how you can be a supportive friend or peer this, if you've experienced this, um, here's how you can see help. Like more of those notifications at the end of the show like if you've experienced this, I guess, like every episode of *Degrassi* has like different resources at the end of shows, maybe 'cause it's a Canadian production as opposed to a lot of the other American produced shows I watch." (Whitney)
Hopes for the Future	Desires for GV depictions in future television shows	Interviewee describes something that they would like television shows to adopt in the future	"I think it's important to depict that there are consequences for your actions. Um, I don't know. I wouldn't want someone to watch it and think

			that they can like engage in those behaviors and get away easy." (Della) "I mean if, it's one thing to see another character struggle, and it's another thing to be told a character struggled. Um, for a visual medium like television, you need to, you need to show not tell a lot of the times. And I feel like, at least in the 2020s if we are going to take this more seriously, from an entertainment standpoint we need to do more showing, less telling that a character is okay." (Shelly)
Program Selection			
Algorithm	Algorithmic recommendations	Show recommendations that come up from the algorithm on a streaming service or platform, such as Netflix's or Hulu's "recommended for you" sections	"Just kind of what's, typically what's shown to me through the streaming things I use, so what it recommends or what friends have suggested to me." (Clarice)
Genre	Genre or tone of the show	Descriptions of television program genres or overall tone or mood of the shows	"For the most part as I said before I usually like crime shows or horror shows or mystery, stuff like that." (Vicki)
Word of Mouth	Word of mouth or peer recommendation	Shows that the interviewee heard about through other people either from direct recommendations or through social media or popular press	"That's how I choose to watch most shows is that I've heard someone else say they're really good. " (Elaine)
Resonance			
Fear	Fear or perceived risk of violence	Instances of increased fear or reinforced fears	"I know that this, this happens in real life and it is not just an

		as a result of watching depictions of gender violence on television; can include specific concerns such as settings where violence may occur, or more abstract or broad fears like being alone or perceiving self to be at risk of being a victim of violence	episode of *Veronica Mars*, so, and it could happen to me so it's still scary." (Courtney)
If Them Then Us	If it can happen on TV, it can happen in real life	Feelings that if a character on television can be a victim of gender violence (i.e. well-off characters, beautiful characters, etc.), then it can happen to anyone, not just in television but in real life	"I was just thinking when that was happening like this woman is in a position of power and if she can basically order somebody to kill someone... and this is happening to her, this can happen to her and that person can get away with it, then what about the rest of us?" (Vicki) "And then you think like it could happen to someone like her with all those resources and she herself was an attorney. And you think about, you know, a woman who doesn't have those kinds of resources, they would be even much more at the mercy, I think of, yeah, victim-blaming." (Margaret)
Societal Implications			
GBV Discourse	Discourse about gender-based violence in real life	The way that gender-based violence is talked about in the real world, including whether it is talked about or not and the language used to talk about it	"Like, but at the same time like there's like this weird what if we don't watch it, then does it mean women's stories aren't being told, does that mean I'm not aware of issues, there's this feeling that you have to somehow be watching the TV show to somehow be doing something about the topics the

			TV show touches on." (Lucy) "Um, well, I think it's good to bring domestic violence out into the open where it can be talked about and it's not just a shameful secret. So in that sense, it definitely serves a function." (Margaret)
Gender Roles	Gender roles or dynamics between genders	Descriptions of what is considered as traditional or archetypal gender roles, or discussions about the dynamics of power and control between genders; can include about how this functions within the show, or more broadly, how the depictions in the show relate to gender roles and dynamics in the real world	"Um, I mean, with You, you just see how he literally traps women in a box. And that just goes on so many dimensions of like women are expected to fit in a box and he's going to force them into that box. Um, I think a lot can be said for that metaphor and the actual scenes that came from that." (Olive) "And I was like this is, this is like, it was putting like uh, almost like a twisted version of the working woman's burden on top of the existing like fabric of the show. Um, this whole idea of like what is a woman anyway, like what if we're wrong too?" (Lucy)
Sociopolitical Connections	Connections to real life politics and society	Direct connections made between a character or an event in the show to people or events that occurred in real life	"I like to encourage people coming forward... but I do think that at the end of the day the courts are so against victims... And I just don't know if showing, uh, one of the rare occurrences where it happens the way you want it to, it's almost like fantasy because it so rarely happens in a conviction." (Olive)
Therapeutic Catharsis			
Processing	Processing or working through	Processing or working through thoughts and	"So like, you know, it's, it's just like that shock value of

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			feelings related to the depictions of gender violence on television that the interviewee works through individually	being put back into a traumatic experience and sort of seeing it in a different light. Um, sometimes, as fucked up as it sounds like it's almost like, kind of a comforting feeling like a familiarity. So I don't know. It's just how I connect with things... it's sort of seeing like new perspectives of, you know, common problems of the world." (Erica)
	Talking w/ Others	Talking with other people about what they saw on television	Talking with other people, sometimes to assist in processing, about the scenes depicting gender violence on television	"It's more like we, honestly I think it's a way for us to calm each other down and we're like did you watch that, did you see how horrible it was, and the other person's like yeah, yeah. Once you talk about it I think that's another way to get your mind off of it, because you kind of you know vented in a way and then you're done with it." (Vicki)
	Therapeutic	Therapy or therapeutic benefits	Therapy or therapeutic benefits received from viewing depictions of gender violence on television	"You know when we think about statistically how often violence towards women happens... I think it's just for us to connect with one another, um, because reality is a lot of people are quiet about what has happened to them, and so seeing it is sort of a therapeutic way of processing their own experience, too." (Erica)
Transportation				
	Continuing Thought	Continuing to think or process afterward	When someone describes continuing to think about or process something that happened in a show after they finish watching the episode, or otherwise	"Um, I think at the end of the, uh, the series it was like a lot of questions. I mean, I immediately tried to interpret instead of just like sitting with the end, you know, it was like, I was quick to trying to see

		continues to respond to or interact with content from the show	what other people felt about it, because I mean it was just, there was, it was so chaotic." (Erica) "Um, and I think in that sense it disturbs me, even afterward, because it reminds me that this isn't just a TV death, there are women who were and are going to be killed in much the same circumstances." (Lucy)
Emotional Response	Emotional responses felt during viewing	Emotional responses that are elicited while viewing a program, including non-physical responses such as sadness, anger, or shock; can also potentially be physical responses related to emotion, such as feeling sick, gasping, or crying	"I cover my face a lot when I don't like what's happening, but I don't cover my eyes. Like I just kind of like hold my face. Um, I start to fidget maybe a little bit, or I definitely cry." (Daisy) "And another thing that makes me angry, um, and a lot of shows depict that and that's also true for real life is how other people who should be supporting the victim or the survivor um are actually casting blame on them or telling them to move on... it would be fair to say it almost makes my blood boil anytime anybody says move on or it might be something that you did." (Vicki)
Need to Know	Needing to know what happens next in the story	Interviewee expresses a need or desire to see what else would happen in an episode or series, and this can include binge-watching habits or watching multiple episodes at a time	"I felt like I wanted to go to the end and see what else would happen. I feel like with those shows, like the drama shows, they always make the end, like the end of the episode one big question mark, and that kind of makes you want to keep watching just to see

			what's going to happen." (Della)

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