Murder in the Family: Representations of Gender in the Mid-Twentieth Century

by

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Abstract

This thesis presents findings from a postgraduate research project examining cultural understandings of gender and violence in cases of fatal domestic homicide committed by men across the mid-twentieth century. Representations of gender and violence have been researched extensively, although the mid-twentieth century has been identified as a neglected period. Using a microhistorical approach, this research explores representations of both adult female victims and children alongside familial relationships in various legal documents and media reports relating to six incidents of domestic homicide between 1955 and 1974. The thesis presents themes across three killings where the wife is the only victim, alongside three cases of familicide. All six of the cases selected involved defences focused on the mental health of the male offender. As the twentieth century saw significant cultural, social and legal developments relating to gender relations and understandings of mental health as a mitigation for criminal responsibility (Loughnan, 2012), it creates fertile ground for cultural research. The thesis explores the creation of meanings in relation to the cases across the period, whilst also examining how representations altered when children were also victims. As such it expands on work exploring cultural understandings of gender and familial relationships in the twentieth century (Seal, 2010; Seal and Neale, 2020; Neale, 2020) through a focus on the period up to 1974 and the inclusion of incidents of familicide. The findings presented in this thesis remain consistent through the different periods, with representations of women not fitting into expected gender roles as well as ‘forgotten’ children.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis explores cultural understandings of gender and violence in cases of domestic homicide across the mid-twentieth century.[1] The cases selected occurred between 1955 and 1974 and consist of three killings of a spouse, alongside three cases of paternal familicide. Each of these offences took place within the family homes and are, therefore, described as "domestic" in nature to reflect this. Each also involved some kind of defence for murder focused on the mental health of the male perpetrator. A microhistorical and cultural approach is adopted throughout this research, analysing cases in depth to provide a rich account of cultural understandings of gender and violence. This research offers a unique academic contribution in this area as representations of victims in cases of familicide and wife killings have not yet been explored in depth in existing work. Furthermore, a victim-focused approach, which seeks to uncover representations of gender and familial relationships, is relatively unexplored in relation to the victimisation experienced by these two particular groups. A focus on the mid-twentieth century provided an opportunity to explore a period which has so far been neglected despite significant legal developments including the introduction of both the *Homicide Act* (1957) and the *Mental Health Act* (1959). Alongside these legal developments, significant social shifts including the emergence of second wave feminism provide an interesting space to explore representations of gender in cases of domestic homicide within this period.

[1] Throughout this thesis, the killings are referred to as 'domestic homicides'. This is to reflect the fact that not all cases involved convictions for murder and to account for the different circumstances across the cases used in this research.

The purpose of this research is to explore cultural representations of gender and violence in cases of fatal domestic violence across the mid-twentieth century. This research provides an important contribution to the knowledge of cases of domestic homicides as it examines a period in history which has yet to be explored in depth. Whilst there is relatively extensive research on cases of domestic homicide prior to the late the nineteenth century, research is limited across the twentieth century. The most significant finding when assessing the existing literature of domestic homicides historically is that there is minimal research which takes a cultural approach. A lack of cultural understandings of gender and violence across the twentieth century make this research a unique contribution to this period of history.

To set up the theories and justifications behind this research, the following chapter will focus on existing literature surrounding the topic. This review highlights some areas where there has been extensive research, particularly historical explorations of domestic homicide from a quantitative approach. While there are some studies analysing domestic homicide qualitatively for some periods in the past, the mid-twentieth century is identified as a period in which qualitative research is sparse, due to the availability of archival records only recently occurring. The literature review first considers existing work which examines the incidence of domestic homicide across different periods, before going on to provide a more extensive consideration of representations of domestic homicide, firstly in relation to spouses or partners and secondly to children. Throughout the literature review, an assessment of existing literature outlines where there are limitations to understandings, as well as identifying gaps in knowledge that this research project hopes to fill.

Chapter 3 will provide an overview of the methods used within this thesis. This includes how cases were selected, how they were collected and the ways in which these were analysed. Initially it considers the advantages and limitations of conducting archival research, including how these have impacted this research project at times. The second half delves into the lives of each of the six families explored in this research, providing important contextual background to the family members and the circumstances leading up to the incidents of homicide. Providing each of the families with a narrative brings their stories to life, giving the opportunity for victims to be put as a central focus since, as it is shown later in this thesis, they are typically pushed aside and 'forgotten' in prevailing representations. Information for these sections is collated from files at The National Archives, including a variety of documents, such as antecedent histories, medical reports, trial transcripts and a series of written statements and depositions from people who knew the families on a personal level.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the themes identified during data analysis. Each of the main themes identified is highlighted under subheadings which reflect the nature of the findings. Throughout the two data chapters a discussion of the findings is presented within the wider scope of existing literature. The first data chapter will look at representations of femininity in discussions of the adult female victims in all cases, familicide as well as spousal murder. The key findings relate to references to the women's physical appearance, as well as representations of their roles as mothers and as wives. In particular these representations suggest the women were suffering with symptoms of what can be considered the "housewife syndrome" (Adams, 2020), which assists in conveying the notion that they

were somewhat ‘deserving’ of their fatal outcomes. The overarching nature of representations discussed throughout this chapter, then, is associated with the women not conforming to the ‘ideal’ of femininity within this period. They were not, however, angels or monsters (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979), although there are aspects of cultural tropes such as the Madonna and the shrew that have some relevance for understanding the way they are portrayed.

Chapter 5 forms the second part of the data analysis, looking closely at representations of the child victims in the cases of familicide, as well as representations of familial relationships more broadly across all the cases. One important finding is that the children appear as ‘flat characters’ within the narratives in the familicide case files (Forster, 1974). Other findings presented in this chapter is that the families are presented predominantly as ‘happy’ and ‘normal’. Within the files representations of the families by people who knew them indicated that the killings were ‘out of the blue’. This data chapter also explores the role of the father within the families’ dynamics with representations of them mainly suggesting that they were good husbands as well as conforming to the ideal father figure role.

To conclude there will be a summary of the arguments presented across this thesis and a discussion of the fact that, despite significant social shifts and change across the period considered, representations of both the adult female and child victims in domestic homicides remain mostly consistent. This finding is consistent across all cases, both familicide and spousal homicide. The conclusion also emphasises the significance of the

findings presented within this thesis, placing them amongst previous research and highlighting its original contribution. The most important gap that this thesis has addressed is the victim-focused approach and the inclusion of child victims, which provides an alternative perspective to much existing research on cases of domestic homicide, which focuses on the perpetrators.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter will provide an overview of literature surrounding domestic homicide across various periods of history, highlighting how previous studies have contributed to this field. The discussion will highlight gaps in knowledge within the literature explored to which this thesis aims to contribute. Domestic homicide has been extensively researched across many centuries using various methods and approaches. Some takes a quantitative approach, establishing patterns and rates of domestic homicide across periods, while other research adopts qualitative approaches, seeking to uncover representations and cultural meanings, although this is often focused on perpetrators. The review highlights significant findings within this research, as well as identifying shortfalls or areas in need of further attention. These gaps in literature demonstrate the significance of this thesis and its contribution to understandings of representations of gender and the family in cases of domestic homicide in the mid-twentieth century.

Researching cases where men kill their wives and in some of the cases children, will provide an understanding of attitudes towards gender and the family during the mid-twentieth century. Despite there being substantial amounts of literature exploring domestic homicide historically, there is little which focuses on cultural understandings of victims, especially children. Seal's (2010) research looks at representations of women who kill and particularly the way their gender is constructed. Despite Seal's research looking comprehensively at perceptions of female offenders across the twentieth century, there is minimal consideration of their experiences as victims of domestic violence and how this may differ. My research will contribute to this perception of gender, considering

differences in the representation of male offenders alongside female victims in cases of fatal domestic violence.

2.1 Research on Incidences of Domestic Homicide

Much of the existing research, particularly in earlier periods, tends to look quantitively at the incidence of domestic violence. This is particularly evident in research exploring domestic murder in the early modern period (Given, 1977; Cockburn, 1977; Beattie, 1986; Sharpe, 1999; Roth, 2001). Such research provides insights into patterns and rates of homicides at this time, however, as Stone (1983) highlights, it is problematic to draw conclusions about family relations using this kind of data. One of the reasons it has been difficult previously to uncover patterns of domestic homicide is that the data collated between 1250 and 1800 has been described as minimal, making research problematic as it is dependent upon the survival of archival materials (Sharpe, 1981). Although, early modern social research has highlighted the family as a factor of "central concern", with research on many areas of early modern family life, such as familial and economic structures to name a few (Sharpe, 1981; 29). However, Sharpe (1981) goes on to state that violence within the family is an area yet to be explored in depth during the early modern period. One of the reasons for this is that consideration must be made for the likelihood that some domestic offences would have gone un-reported. For example, Sharpe explains that "contemporary ideas on male dominance would make it unlikely that a husband would take legal action against a violent wife" (Sharpe, 1981; 32). For this reason, analysing cases of domestic homicide in this period is seen as the most accurate indicator because it is "the most difficult of crimes to conceal, and the most likely recorded" (Stone, 1983; 23).

Consequently, analysing cases of domestic homicide is a more accurate way of attempting to interpret levels of violence within the family during this period of history (Sharpe, 1981). This potential dark figure has been a problem when researching domestic violence historically across all periods though. This is one reason that this thesis focuses on cases of domestic homicide, as detailed evidence remains in case files whereas those for less serious incidents of domestic violence are less likely to be preserved. Within historical research reliance of the survival of records determines to a degree the outcome of findings. Where documents do not exist, or are poorly preserved, difficulties arise as documents represent the only way of conducting this type of research (Seal, 2012).

Moving on from the early modern period, comprehensive consideration has been given to researching domestic homicide prior to and across the nineteenth century (Sharpe, 1981; Gurr, 1981; Dolan, 1994; Leneman, 1997; Startup, 2000; Emsley, 2005; Weiner, 2004). Additionally, some work examines intimate violence and domestic murder during this period in America, providing potential for comparisons to be made (Bowman and Altman, 2003; Ramsey, 2006). Startup (2000; 32) highlights the significant social developments in mid-nineteenth century England including the ongoing industrialisation of businesses as well as the growing employment of women and children, "raising issues of domestic efficiency…challenging traditional notions of the sexual division of labour". The significance of choosing periods of history in which significant societal developments occurred.

The period after the Second World War was significant in relation to researching the incidence of domestic violence, as well as differences in gender roles between men and women (Neale, 2020). In the period between the wars, incidences of violent crime generally were relatively low, with the most frequent types of murder involving "domestic or courtship homicides" (D'Cruze, 2007; 702). The return of soldiers to England following the First World War began at the end of 1918 and Emsley (2008) highlights that there was particularly limited support for families during this process, resulting in any tensions and pressure largely kept within the family. Instances where violence was used by a soldier against his family saw keen interest from the press, drawing "attention to them and to some of the problems created by the war that could be seen as a prompt to their violence" (Emsley, 2008; 174).

Similarly, during the period following the Second World War, Neale (2020) emphasises cases where soldiers returned and went on to murder their wives for being unfaithful, or for not fulfilling the roles expected of them. She gives the example of a case in which Ivy Booth was murdered by her husband in 1945 when he returned home unexpectedly while she was at the pub, rather than waiting at home for his return. The reason for his visit was that she had stopped writing as regularly as expected and he assumed that she had been seeing other men. Fred Booth's "status as a soldier was highlighted by press in sympathetic pen-portraits…and damning ones of Ivy" (Neale, 2020; 108). This case highlights the conflict in society after the World Wars and the impact of shifting perceptions of gender across this period, which immediately proceeds my own focus.

Neale's (2020) analysis of the Booth case also highlights the significance of representations for understandings of domestic violence and homicide through its focus on the press and how ideas of culpability and victimisation were perceived in both the media and society generally, as well as testing new societal understandings of gender norms. The next section will turn to consider this, showing how women were seen throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries as deserving of and often responsible for, men's violence against them. Despite the seemingly more critical stance of the courts through the modern period, then blame continued to be placed on women for the violence of men, meaning that domestic homicides failed "to show clear evidence of diminution" (Weiner, 2004; 3).

2.2 Research on Representations of Domestic Homicide

Whilst an idea of the prevalence of incidents of domestic violence is useful, consideration must be given to contextualising these findings, looking deeper into the meanings and representations of domestic homicide in society at different times. Cultural research highlights the significance of perceptions and social understandings of gender at different periods. A noticeable pattern relates to changes in how violence by a man against his wife and family was understood, which in turn influenced social responses to this. Early modern ideas of the hierarchy of gender within society "opposed manhood to effeminacy, which was understood in the female terms of emotional weakness, softness, delicacy and self-indulgence" (Fletcher, 1999; 421). Indeed, as discussed earlier, Sharpe (1981; 32) shows that identifying levels of domestic violence at this time is difficult because of contemporary perceptions of masculinity. With this in mind, analysing cases of homicide using a cultural

approach provides an opportunity to understand how cases of domestic homicide were constructed and perceived by society and the courts.

In the seventeenth century violence by men against their wives was understood as a form of discipline (Amussen, 1994; 1995) and even into the eighteenth century it was widely accepted that a husband may chastise his wife (Emsley, 2005). Despite this, emerging ideas of masculinity "whittled away at the tolerance of such behaviour… [and] from the late eighteenth century the courts began to take a more critical view of wife beating" (Emsley, 2005; 102). This is supported by Weiner (2004), who considers a man's use of force against his wife came under challenge more frequently at this time, with judges becoming more likely to stigmatize violent behaviour when issuing sentences. Similarly, Gurr (1981: 295) suggests that societal attitudes shifted, with reduced public tolerance of violence generally as a result of a progressive "sensitisation of violence".

It could be argued that social meanings associated with domestic violence historically are partly connected to the meanings of violence more generally. This relates specifically to how certain types of murders are understood. D'Cruze et al., (2006; 46) outlines that the types of behaviours typically attributed to women such as "passivity, non-aggression and nurturing" make offences committed by them more surprising. Similarly, May (1999) researched this notion of victimhood and how attitudes towards victims and offenders differed depending upon their situation. Social understandings of violence, she describes, "seem to revolve around notions of culpability and victimization" (May, 1999; 490). Murder was more socially accepted in circumstances in which there was a "wholly innocent

victim and wholly culpable offender" (May, 1999; 503). This concept is supported by Neale (2020), who outlines that there were powerful incentives for husbands who were accused of murdering their wife to accuse them of 'nagging' behaviour, unfaithfulness, or acting against social ideals (Neale, 2020). These accusations, truthful or not, had a number of effects, acting to gain sympathy from the "jury, judge and Home Office; mitigate crimes; lessen sentences; aid appeals for mercy; and in some cases help men literally get away with murder" (Neale, 2020; 105-106). The potential implications of this were increased in the late 1950s when the *Homicide Act* (1957) introduced diminished responsibility as a partial defence for murder (Gooderson, 1958), this is an important element in the cases considered in my research which span the period of this change.

Dolan (1994) carried out an interesting study which analysed court records quantitatively, alongside popular literature between 1550 to 1700. He suggests that these documents are interpretable as representations of domestic murders which either do, or do not, conform to the actual experiences of domestic violence in the early modern period (Dolan, 1994). Alongside statistical analysis, this use of popular literature is beneficial for analysis as it can contain considerable information about the views of individuals, including attitudes and values (Neuburg, 1977). This is something that has been implemented later on in the thesis in my analysis of representations of femininity within the cases used in this research because drawing on gendered representations of men and women in the media at particular points historically contributes to gaining a comprehensive understanding of society's views at this time, adding contextual perspective.

Weiner (2004; 3-28) argues that there was a profound "change in constructions of femininity and masculinity", which can be considered a "reconstruction of gender" during the late nineteenth century. The reign of the female monarch, Queen Victoria (1837-1901), brought about a change of ideas surrounding family life and the "heightened moral influence of women" (Weiner, 2004; 3-4). Despite these seemingly positive developments, this in fact expanded gender distinctions, pressurising women to fit the ideal "womanhood" dominant in social constructions at this time (Wiener, 2004; 5). Perceptions of the 'ideal' male were also contested, however, with emphasis on the "domestication of male ideals", such as behaving as a "man of honour" (Weiner, 2004; 6). This reconstruction of gender resulted in the criminal justice system becoming a "site of intense cultural contestation over the proper roles and relations between the sexes" (Weiner, 2004; 6). Despite the seemingly declining tolerance of domestic violence from the courts during the Victorian period, violence against women by their husbands continued to be justified in various ways across the late-nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Patterns of domestic violence were evident throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Throughout the Victorian period there were elements of continuity as well as developments in the of handling of lethal violence against women by their husbands (Weiner, 2004). Gurr (1981) suggests that throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was a reduction of tolerance from the public of violence. This shift in representations came as a result of a progressive "sensitisation of violence" (Gurr, 1981; 295). The seemingly progressive understandings of violence were seen across multiple aspects of society, in public, as well as in legal settings. The introduction of the

Criminal Procedure Act 1853 titled 'An Act for the better Prevention and Punishment of aggravated Assaults upon Women and Children' specified limits to the amount of punishment that a man could administer on his wife or children (Emsley, 2005). Despite limits to chastisement, there was still the belief that violence against women was, in some ways, deserved, with "aggravation on the part of the wife" as a potential mitigating factor (Emsley, 2005; 103). This idea is supported by Heidensohn (1985) who suggested that "women are represented as either good and placed on pedestals or bad and given their just deserts" (Wykes and Walsh, 2009; 64).

As well as this, the courts were handing out tougher sentences for cases of murder, with wife-killers more susceptible to receive capital punishment (D'Cruze et al., 2006). Despite this seemingly more critical stance of the courts, domestic murders were "failing to show clear evidence of diminution" (Weiner, 2004; 3). Despite these advances and shifts, domestic homicide and violence against women by their husbands continued across the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century.

Existing literature surrounding representations of females and crime, both historically and in contemporary society, often focuses on women as perpetrators (Farr, 2000, Storrs, 2004, Bess, 2006, Shoemaker, 2010, Hillman and Ruberry-Blanc, 2016, O'Hare, 2018) despite the fact that women are statistically much more likely to be victims of domestic murder than perpetrators (Hester, 2009). Those studies which consider representations of women as victims of domestic violence rarely consider this in isolation, meaning there is also a strong concern with representations of the usually male perpetrator (Evans, 2001, Hearn

and McKie, 2010, Walsh, 2016 and Lloyd and Ramon, 2017). Seal's (2010; 173) analysis of representations of women who kill highlights how understandings of their femininity is key to this in the mid-twentieth century, a time which saw significant social shifts following "major transformations in post-war British life". She highlights that statistically women commit significantly less murders than men, however, when this type of offence is committed by a woman it is identified as more shocking because it violates "norms of femininity, such as nurturance, gentleness and social conformity". She portrays how violence committed by males "is an accepted attribute of most recognised masculinities", differing to representations of murder committed by females (D'Cruze et al., 2006; 46).

Cultural representations of women are often understood through a dichotomy which separates good women from bad. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) offered an early and significant contribution to this through an analysis of nineteenth century literary texts. Their identification that female characters could be divided into "angels" and "monsters" was influential, inspiring further analyses which adopted different labels for these two extremes, including the "Madonna" and the "whore" or "virgins" and "vamps" (Welldone, 2018, Benedict, 1992). Such categorisations have been identified as relevant for cultural representations of crime victims and especially those involving sexual or violent offences, often functioning to enable victim blaming or mitigate male responsibility (Meyers, 1997, Dowler, 2006, Cabrera, 2018). To reiterate, femininity and sexuality are central to the way that women are represented as both victims and perpetrators of violence. This research bridges some of the gaps identified within existing literature, placing representations of female victims at the centre of analysis in a period which has been little considered, but

also including the representation of child victims in cases of familicide, a subject I consider in the next section.

2.3 Research on Representations of Child Homicide

Child murder has been researched extensively in some respects but less so in others. The most extensively discussed type of child murder is the offence of infanticide, with a number of studies exploring both the incidence of this and representations of the female perpetrators, which often specifically relate to their role as a mother (Startup, 2000). This form of child murder is a gender-specific offence, outlined in section one of the *Infanticide Act* (1922) as "where a woman by any willful act or omission causes the death of her child being a child under the age of twelve months". This legislation removed the death penalty as a punishment for a woman who killed her newborn baby. It is argued by Howard (2018; 471) that infanticide originated historically as a "compassionate alternative to capital punishment for those 'illegitimate mothers' who killed their newborn infants in desperation". There is no such defence for a male who kills their child, therefore it could be suggested that there is a notion of compassion in society at this time for women who killed their child. The act of infanticide is constructed as a 'female activity' not only because solely women could be convicted of this offence, but because "their crimes were seen to be consistent with the essential nature of womanhood" (Startup, 2000; 22). This suggests that attitudes relating to the culpability of the female offender were reflected in ideas of capital punishment, that women should not be sentenced to death for crimes relating to child murder. As well as crimes relating to the killing of children, there is a sense of distaste for hanging women generally. Seal (2014; 132) notes that the narrative of

the execution of Edith Thompson was that of a “miscarriage of justice that demonstrated the sexism encoded into the criminal justice system”. Perceptions of gender from the courts were evident in the sentencing of women who had committed murder, with judges tending to understand the constraint of women by societal norms, showing their “benevolence and chivalry” (Callahan, 2013; 1030). Those women who were handed the harshest sentence of capital punishment were subjected to the courts exercising of its “potency”, as the women who were sentenced to death “defied the gender roles as understood by society” (Callahan, 2013; 1030).

Research looking at child murder committed by fathers, on the other hand, is much sparser, with few historical studies of male perpetrated child murder published compared with that of infanticide (Lister, 2016). This is supported by Gregory (2003), who argues that, despite scholars in this research field being aware of male perpetrated domestic violence, little attention has been paid to fathers who kill their children. Gregory’s research into paternal child killings focused on representations within the media between 1826-1849. She examines how representations of men were less sympathetic than women who were convicted of infanticide (Gregory, 2003). One of the findings presented is that most cases of domestic murder were not printed and published in newspapers. Despite this, Gregory (2003; 72) highlights that “accounts which do not necessarily illustrate the existence of a broad and highly visible cultural conversation like that surrounding maternal infanticide, are nevertheless significant as narrations of an infrequently discussed phenomenon”. More recently publicised research indicates that this is an area which has started to become more widely studied, especially as archival material from the twentieth century is now being

made available (Butler, 2018). Butler's work on paternal domestic homicide (2018), like Gregory, explores representations of men in newspapers, but between 1900 to 1939. She argues that, whilst the act of murdering one of their children did not conform to ideals of fatherhood, the cases were portrayed in the media lightly. Butler (2018; 12) argues that portrayals of the men in these cases were "mainly sympathetic… presented as having carried out the ultimate act of parental devotion". Fathers who were perceived to have failed to live up to expectations, particularly relating to their economic situation, were found to be understood mainly sympathetically in the press (Butler, 2018). She indicates that they were often references as failing to provide for their families economically. Butler highlights these economic expectations held by society as "damaging for some men and fathers" and that if it was portrayed that they had attempted to fulfil these expectations, that they would be treated sympathetically (Butler, 2018; 12). In contemporary society it is recognised that child victims have become more prominent within media discourses in recent decades (Greer, 2003), but familial abuse is still virtually absent (Kitzinger, 1999).

As this chapter has outlined, one of the main reasons archival research in the twentieth century, particularly the latter half, has been minimal relates to the availability of open archive documents. Consequently, the focus for discussions is often press reports rather than other relevant documentation. The discussion also shows how existing research with the "historical, cultural and legal focus of child homicide cases is and was always centred on the perpetrator" (Lister, 2016). Influenced by recent feminist discussions of the ethics of memory (Dean, 2008), my research takes as its central focus the representation of victims of domestic homicide, placing them at the forefront in an academic arena where

they have been more often than not forgotten. The research expands on work by Gregory (2003), Butler (2018) and Neale 2020), explores cases of domestic murder, including familicide, in the mid-twentieth century. One particularly original contribution of my work is the comparison of such representations in cases of men who kill their children and men who kill only their spouses.

This review has outlined key authors and studies which have contributed to knowledge in the field of domestic homicide. As well as considering existing literature, gaps in knowledge have also been identified to which this thesis responds. Using a cultural approach to explore representations of gender and familial relationships expands on existing work considering the patterns and incidences of domestic homicide. It is particularly influenced by Neale's (2020) recent work using cultural methods to look deeper into societal understandings of domestic homicide through case studies drawn from court and trial documents. However, it expands on this by extending consideration to a slightly more recent time period and through the inclusion of cases of familicide. Exploration of these under researched areas allows for deeper understandings of how society interpreted and made meaning in response to the killing of children, as well as women, in the twentieth century (Lister, 2016). This thesis counters the prevailing focus on perpetrators of domestic homicide, making the argument that representations of victims of domestic homicide are important in identifying social constructions of families as well as gender.

The next chapter will explore the methods used to conduct this research including the adoption of a cultural approach to explore representations of gender as highlighted throughout the literature review. The types of archives used is discussed as well as considerations of benefits and limitations of using these types of documents in cultural research. Within the next part of the chapter there will be an overview of each of the six families, providing details about their lives which were up until now concealed within the archives.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Case Synopses

3.1 Methods

Culture is described by Saleebey (1994; 352) as the way we "receive, organize, rationalise and understand our particular experiences in the world". A cultural approach is valuable when attempting to understand taboo dispositions and how they are reflected contextually in society within the time period being explored. Saleebey (1994) outlines that a fundamental factor of a cultural understanding are stories and narratives. With this in mind the cases of domestic homicide selected for this research have been chosen to provide a comprehensive insight into cultural attitudes which have not been explored in depth historically. Dolan (1994) highlights that culture can be interpreted as a struggle or conflict over meaning, making criminal cases particularly insightful (Seal, 2010). Murder is described as socially constructed, particularly "through the effects on attributions of culpability and understandings of the nature of victim vulnerability" (Richardson and May, 1999; 310). As well as being a socially constructed term, murder has been suggested by Strange (1999; 693) to represent a "rending of the social fabric when normally unspoken cultural dispositions … are suddenly articulated" (Seal, 2010; 11). Use of a cultural criminological approach has been described as one that "captures the gritty particulars of everyday experience" (Ferrell et al., 2004; 2). One of its benefits is that it allows the researcher to understand experiences of crime and victimisation in a way which cannot be achieved using a quantitative approach (Ferrell, 2010). The close analysis of a singular case using this approach can "illuminate crucial links between gender relations and political conflict" (Berenson, 1993; 8). With this in mind, perceptions of a situation are open to interpretation by individuals and can be understood in different ways. This makes research

which explores perceptions of cases of murder, and in this instance, cases of domestic homicide a "valuable way of exploring social interaction" (Given, 1977; 1).

A relatively recent contribution in this area is the work of Neale (2020), who explores how the photographing of crime scenes in the early to mid-twentieth century provides insights into cultural understandings of domestic homicide through the differing narratives constructed of cases within the investigation and trial process. An understanding of "narratives across place and time makes it possible to identify similar constructions in cases from different time periods" (Neale, 2020; 5). With this in mind, my research concerns six specific cases across the mid twentieth century between the years of 1955 and 1974. Microhistorical approaches have been described as ones that "ask big questions in small places" (Vadi, 2018; 4). This is supported by Neale (2020) who outlines that applying a microhistory method can highlight macro themes, including "socio-cultural implications of crime". As a result, this approach provides researchers a chance to explore criminality and conceptions of criminality in depth across multiple periods of history, identifying macro themes in a series of micro studies (Yeomans et al., 2020). This approach will be beneficial in my research as looking at discourses and constructing narratives of cases are "indispensable concepts for analysing gender construction" (Seal, 2010; 4). This cultural gender construction will allow for an in-depth understanding of attitudes and developments across the mid-twentieth century in the six cases of domestic murder selected for this research.

Pragmatics played a role in the selection of the cases used in this research. At the start of the research process the National Archives were closed as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, meaning that it was not possible to go and look at and retrieve files to begin with. When speaking with my supervisor, it became clear that there were a set of files from sixteen different cases which she had already photographed for separate projects. I had the chance to read through case notes of each of these including information about the year the murder took place, details of the victims and the perpetrator as well as the outcome of the case including the plea and sentence given. In addition to looking briefly at the contents of these files, searches were conducted on the British Newspaper Archive to gauge whether there were any articles relating to the publications of these offences and trials. Combined, this helped to narrow down the sixteen cases by firstly looking at the availability of files which were available to view publicly. Something which was apparent when doing this initial sweep of available cases was that a large number of cases involved some kind of defence for murder focused on the mental health of the male perpetrator. I had already highlighted the post 1950s period as of interest due to the introduction of the *Homicide Act* (1957) and the *Mental Health Act* (1959). Within the cases which had been previously photographed, three of them were familicide cases which spanned across the decades of 1950, 1960 and 1970. Following this, exploration of existing research had indicated that there was a lack of studies which focuses on themes and representations across cases of familicide and spousal murder, therefore influencing the selection of these cases. There were thirteen cases of spousal murder which had already been photographed, however it was narrowed down to select one from each of the chosen periods. There were four cases from the 1950s, eight from the 1960s and one from the 1970s. Selection of a case from

both 1950 and 1960 was based on the accessibility of files as well as cases in which the male perpetrator had made a defence for murder focused on the mental health of the male perpetrator. Selecting cases with this common factor allowed for a consistency of circumstances which made identifying themes and patterns interesting. Selecting three cases of familicide alongside cases of spousal murder which spanned across the same decades to allowed for themes across both types of familial murder to be made between each of the cases throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. When looking on the National Archives website, it became clear that two of the cases I had chosen had accessible files which had not yet been photographed. This meant that as soon as life got 'back to normal' and restrictions were lifted, I was still able to get my experience first-hand at the National Archives, photographing the files I required.

The files used in this research from the National Archives include four Assize or Central Criminal Court files (ASSI or J), two Prison Commission files on individual prisoners and one Department of Public Prosecution file (DPP). Within these files are a significant variety of documents, including depositions, police statements and interviews, transcripts of trials including evidence presented, case summaries and details of appeals, extensive psychiatric reports, handwritten letters from the accused and newspaper clippings, as well as hand-drawn floor plans and photographs of the crime scene. Each of the file's contents were completely unique, which is inevitable because of record survival but creates some complications for comparative analysis. Additionally, there were files relating to some cases which are not yet open to the public. The process at The National Archives involved taking photographs of each file and all of its contents on my smart phone to allow maximum

opportunity to capture all of the images required in the allotted time slot. Neale (2018) highlights that this is the approach she used when gathering similar data as it provides the researcher the time to approach each document with no time constraints, allowing in-depth reading and the chance to revisit documents as often as needed without the worry of misplacing hand-written or typed notes. Once the photographs had been taken, an initial sweep of documents provided an insight into key concepts and themes to be attentive to. Following this, significant time was taken to look through each of the files in depth, page by page, transcribing sections of handwritten notes when required, as well as identifying and extracting any references to representations of the women and children in the cases.

Data predominantly consists of these archive files. Whilst analysing this data, consideration has been given to account for the credibility of the narratives portrayed within the depositions. Neale (2020) highlights that initially reading these sorts of files may suggest they are a direct reflection of what the individual said, in a continuous prose, freely describing their accounts of the events leading up to an incident. Neale (2020) describes this initial process as reading the documents "along the grain". In order to establish a more comprehensive understanding, Neale (2020; 35) indicates that a researcher must read "against the grain". Adopting this approach means that the researcher looks beyond the initial meaning of the document, in this case revealing that the depositions can be perceived as "enforced narratives, heavily constructed stories, the details of which arose from closed questions put to witnesses" (Neale, 2020; 35). Depositions and other such documents, then, do not establish 'the reality' of the events surrounding the deaths of the women and children studied, but should instead be viewed and used by the researcher as "puzzle pieces,

arranged to form narratives" (Neale, 2020; 36). The approach used in this research was to piece together narratives from a variety of sources to form an understanding of the characterisation and representation of victims of domestic homicide within the cases considered. Although these understandings will not necessarily be a direct reflection of the 'truth' about what happened, the offer insight into the perspectives and cultural understandings of key factors such as the police in responding to these cases.

Seal and Neale (2020) suggest that understanding the archives consulted is vital when attempting to interpret representations from documents which lie within them. They state that the archives "contain documents that were an active part of bureaucratic practices that had real effects on lives, as well as being sources of representations of people and events" (Seal and Neale, 2020; 290). The concept expressed here is that the content found within the many files situated within the archives cannot be seen as unbiased sources. Additionally, Seale and Neale (2020) describe the material selected for preservation within the archives as potentially reflecting the agenda of the government of the time. Despite these reservations, using sources gathered from within the archives with care, specifically witness statements and depositions, "reveal much about relationships, household compositions, the jobs people held and the ways in which they gave support to one another" (Seal and Neale, 2020; 291). The findings of my thesis support this and throughout the research the nature of the data as "enforced narratives", and so sources which must be approached with a level of caution (Neale, 2020), were kept in mind.

The cases explored for this research occurred in the mid-twentieth century, between 1955 and 1974. Since existing historical research generally relates solely to the killing of spouses, with cases of familicide committed by males so far subject to little research, "their epidemiology remains virtually unstudied" (Wilson et al. 1995; 275). Central to the research aims was the need to select cases which would enable comparison of cases of wife killing and familicide. The period between the1950s and the 1970s was selected as post-war social changes alongside the rise of second-wave feminism resulted in profound shifts to prevailing ideas of gender roles and how men and women were represented in society (Hilden, 1982).

As well as societal developments in relation to gender, there were also two significant legal developments which affected the possible narratives that could be constructed in court cases involving domestic homicide. The first was the *Homicide Act* (1957) which introduced partial defences for murder, including diminished responsibility. Under section 2(1) of this Act an offender could be convicted for manslaughter rather than of murder "if he was suffering from such abnormality of mind (whether arising from a condition of arrested or retarded development of mind or any inherent causes or induced by disease or injury) as substantially impaired his mental responsibility for his acts or omissions in doing or being a party to the killing" (*Homicide Act*, 1957). For an offender to successfully put forward a plea of diminished responsibility, the abnormality of mind must have been found to have impaired their mental responsibility to an extent in which was deemed 'substantial' by the courts (Kennefick, 2011). The second significant legal development was the introduction of the *Mental Health Act* (1959), which created alternate disposals for those

offenders who were considered to have diminished responsibility under the new law. This legislation gave courts the power to send "mentally disordered offenders to hospital and if necessary to impose restrictions to prevent them being moved or discharged without the consent of the Home Secretary" (Dell, 1983; 50). The significance of these pieces of legislation are evident in this research as all six cases involved some kind of mental health as a defence.

The cases involving the Windle and Mulroy families occurred in the 1950s, and so prior to the introduction of the *Homicide Act* (1957). With this in mind, their inclusion allowed comparison with the other four cases, which occurred after the new legislation, providing a chance to assess the extent to which representations of these cases of domestic homicide were impacted by significant shifts in legal understandings of criminal responsibility. To comprehensively explore the period identified, two cases, one each of wife killing and familicide, were selected from each decade between 1950 and1980 to allow comparison both within each decade as well as across them. This process provided a sample of both familicide and murder of a female spouse across each of the three decades, providing a relatively balanced sample of similar cases occurring across different periods.

3.2 Case Synopses

The next section of this chapter provides a brief overview of the six cases explored in this research. The majority of the information provided is taken from a selection of sources, including the archive files and newspaper reports retrieved from the British Newspaper Archives. Some family history information was also accessed online through Ancestry.com

when that information was not available in the archive files. The detail within each case varies based upon the range of information publicly available and is a direct reflection of the varied nature of materials open to the public in archival research discussed above. There are details surrounding each of the killings, some of which are graphic, including the extent of fatal injuries suffered by the victims in these cases. Within the synopses, I wanted to make real the violence that the victims experienced to outline the severity of these crimes and to challenge the narratives created about them in the files. Attention has been paid to conveying these sensitively and respectfully, whilst enabling sufficient information to contextualise the cases.

As previously mentioned, Neale (2020) highlights how court and prosecution files created particular narratives in relation to cases which need to be read both along the grain and against the grain. In contrast to many of the cases Neale (2020) considers, the narratives generated in these cases were not particularly challenged in court through adversarial processes. All relied on a construction which presented the perpetrator as factually guilty but not fully responsible as a result of mental ill health. The conditions which caused this differed, as did the degree to which the narrative of mitigation was fully accepted, but the basic presentation is similar in all cases and was relatively unchallenged by the prosecution. Three men were not fully tried, with one being found unfit to plead (Claude Dixon), while two had their pleas of guilty to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility (William Bromley and Frank Wheddon). In another the prosecution presented only the evidence of the accused's statement and did not contest the medical evidence that enabled a finding of diminished responsibility. A further case involved the jury reaching a verdict

of guilty but insane without leaving to deliberate this decision. In only one case, then, was there significant contest to the defence's claims from the prosecution, and this simply involved the argument that no evidence of insanity had been produced.

3.2.1 Cases of Spousal Homicide

3.2.1.1 The Windle Family (1952)[2]

Francis Wilfred Windle was born in 1912 in Birmingham and was the youngest of seven children (PCOM 9/2152, Prison Minutes, 15th June 1956). Some 36 years later, he met and later married his wife Florence May Nuttall. Florence had also been born in Birmingham in 1894. There is no indication within the files as to how the pair met, but much is made of the 18-year age gap between the couple, with - Florence being the elder. Francis and Florence married in April 1948 after "six months acquaintance" and lived together in Birmingham until 1952 (PCOM 9/2152, Prison Minutes, 15th June 1956). Francis was employed at Monument Road Baths as a Bath Attendant, which was about an hour's walk from their home. The couple "occupied two furnished rooms" at a property in Cheatham Street in Birmingham, leased by Charles and Elsie Clark for the two-year period leading up to Florence's death (ASSI 13/270, Charles Clark's Statement, 27th February 1952). Francis and Florence were the only couple out of the six cases used in this research who did not have any children, either together or from previous relationships. Florence's sister Violet informed police that Florence had been married previously on two occasions before

[2] The archive files relating to Francis Windle's case are ASSI 13/270 and PCOM 9/2152.

her wedding with Francis. There is an indication within the files that both Florence's previous husbands had died.

The documents within the files present the couple's marriage as anything but harmonious, with multiple references to their constant arguing. Francis is portrayed as often complaining about Florence and her behaviour – particularly relating to her suffering with her mental health issues. He described her as "continually ill", "neurotic", "suffering with insomnia" and "suffering with her nerves" (ASSI 12/270, Harry Hunt's Statement, 27th February 1952). Florence's sister, too, indicated that she had tried to commit suicide previously by poisoning herself with gas (ASSI 13/270, Violet Smith's Statement, 27th February 1952). In conversations with work colleagues, Francis apparently told them Florence had made threats to end her life and that "he was always expecting his wife to commit suicide" (ASSI 13/270, Harry Hunt's Statement, 27th February 1952). One fellow employee in particular, Horace Chilton, recalled to police a conversation he had with Francis right before the murder took place. Given Francis's continual complaints about Florence, Horace describes feeling "fed up" during this conversation, leading him "sarcastically" to say "why don't you give her a couple of dozen aspirins". A remark he thought would "shut him up" (ASSI 13/270, Horace Chilton's Statement, 27th February 1952). This was Horace's last conversation with Francis before his arrest. Elsie Clark also described the couple as "arguing more than usual" on the day of the murder (ASSI 13/270, Elsie Clark'a Statement, 27th February 1952).

The couple were married for just four years before Francis killed Florence. On the 30th January 1952, at about ten past eleven the couple were about to go to bed, Francis described to police dissolving 100 aspirin tablets into a cup of water, stating that he "knew this would finish her off" (ASSI 13/270 Horace Chilton's Statement, 27th February 1952). Florence was immediately taken ill and transported to Birmingham General Hospital by ambulance, where she later died from the fatal overdose. On his arrest, Francis said to the police officers that he supposed "they will hang me for this?" (ASSI 13/270, Detective Constable John Turner's Statement, 27th February 1952).

Francis Windle pleaded insanity at his trial, his doctors suggesting he was suffering with a form of "communicated insanity known as *folie à deux"*, which includes several syndromes in which mental symptoms… are transmitted from one person to another" (Dine et al., 2010: 436; Kumar et al., 2005: 164). As the case occurred prior to the *Homicide Act* (1957), diminished responsibility was not a possible defence, and ultimately his insanity plea, which required evidence a higher level of incapacitation, was unsuccessful. The prosecution did not contest the facts of the case, or the defence's unfavourable presentation of Florence, but they argued that the Judge should direct the jury to find a verdict of guilty as no evidence of insanity was being presented (*Bradford Observer, 1952*). The judge consequently instructed the jury they could not find a verdict of guilty but insane, although they still took forty-five minutes to deliberate the case (*Bradford Observer, 1952*). This was the case in which there was most contest over the verdict, and the only where mitigation was not accepted by the court.

As a result of the judge's direction, Francis was convicted of murder on the 8th April, 1952 at the Birmingham Assizes, and sentenced to death. An appeal was submitted disputing the Judge's ruling, but this was dismissed and Francis's execution date was set for Wednesday 28th May 1952 at 9am. The Home Secretary's review of the case, though, led him to offer a reprieve, commuting the death sentence to one of life imprisonment. This followed a significant public appeal in which "hundreds of people" signed a petition organised by Mr. Jesse Williams – a spare time prison visitor (PCOM 9/2152, Newspaper Clipping, 24th May 1952). The reprieve decision recognised some degree of mitigation on the grounds of Francis not being fully culpable for his actions, since it was granted on the grounds that he was of low intelligence and a weak character (PCOM 9 2152, Prison Minutes, 23rd March 1959). The file also suggests it was influenced to some degree by negative representations of Florence presented at the trial. Frank was eventually released from Leyhill Prison on 9th March 1960, having served eight years in custody. He lived until he was 60 years of age, passing away in 1972.

3.2.1.2 The Cox Family (1967)[3]

Maurice George Cox was born in Woking, Surrey on 28th August 1918 and was the eldest of four children. Throughout his life a number of tragic family events occurred. Both his younger brothers were killed during active service in World War II, and his mother tragically committed suicide by gas poisoning in 1947. Maurice worked in various industries, with his last employment before his arrest being with Royston Electrics on Canada Road, Byfleet as a Temporary Storeman (ASSI 36/570, Antecedent History, no

[3] The archive files relating to Maurice George Cox's case are ASSI 36/570 and J 82/824.

date). The lady who later marry Maurice was named Daisy Clifton. She was also born in Woking, two years after Maurice in 1920. Again, no details are available as to how the couple met, but they married on 2nd February 1941 and went on to have a child together, a daughter named Geraldine who was born on 3rd July 1945. As an adult their daughter herself married, moving out of the family home to go to Worcester in October 1966. Maurice resided with Daisy in a "semi-detached house owned by Woking Urban District Council" (ASSI 36/570, Antecedent History, no date). Unlike in the Windle case, little information surrounding the couple's marriage is given in the files, although Maurice said in his statement to the police: "I want you to understand that my wife is an angel" (ASSI 36/570, Medical Report, 13th March 1967). This representation of their marriage was supported by the Judge at the appeal. who stated that "one of the real tragedies, in fact the very real tragedy, of this case was the devotion of his wife to him" (J 82/824, Judge's Comments at Appeal Trial, 30th November 1967).

At some point during their marriage, it appears that Maurice began to suffer with his mental health. The appeal files indicate he "became so seriously and gravely depressed in his mental outlook that his general attitude and responsibility was such that he could not cope with the day-to-day facts and matters of life" (J 82/824, Defence's Speech to the Jury at Appeal Trial, 30th November 1967). In May of the year prior to the killing, Maurice was admitted into hospital where he was "compulsorily detained" (J 82/824, Defence's Speech to the Jury at Appeal Trial, 30th November 1967). He was readmitted in November 1966 after attempting to commit suicide. At the time of the offence, the Judge described Maurice as being in a "terrible state of anxiety, worry and obsessed with the idea of suicide, wishing

to take his wife with him as well" (J 82/824, Judge's Comments at Appeal Trial, 30th November 1967).

In January 1967 Daisy Cox was found face down on the stairs in their house with a fatal stab wound from a carving knife, which remained in position in her chest. In his statement to the police, Maurice provided details of what took place on the day of Daisy's murder, starting with him and his wife getting up about nice and having a cup of tea. After this seemingly ordinary domestic act, Maurice says he picked up:

> a cold chisel from the shed and then hit Daisy on top of the head with it. I hit her a number of times to make sure then I went and got the hammer from the shed I hit her on the head with it as I wanted to make sure because she was moaning Daisy was still sitting in the chair when I put the bread knife into her heart and I hit the knife into her with a hammer. (ASSI 36/570, Detective Inspector Harman's Statement, 7th March 1967).

After murdering Daisy, Maurice attempted to commit suicide using the same method as his mother used twenty years before. He placed his head inside the oven in the kitchen with all the gas taps turned on. In his statement he said that "the gas didn't seem to have any effect" so he "tried to stick the carving knife in my chest but I had not got the strength" (ASSI 36/570, Maurice Cox's Police Interview, 28th January 1967). The leaking gas eventually caused a severe explosion at the property, destroying the whole building. Despite the attempt on his life, Maurice survived the explosion and was found unconscious at the scene, underneath debris, his head still partly inside the gas oven. Surprisingly he only suffered

minor injuries, including numerous abrasions across his body, as well as singed hair, eyebrows and eyelashes (ASSI 36/570, James Edney's Statement, 27th January 1967).

At trial Maurice relied on the provisions of the *Homicide Act* (1957) and pleaded not guilty to murder on the grounds of diminished responsibility. His plea was not accepted by the prosecution and so the case had to be put to a jury, although in the end the prosecution offered no further evidence than Maurice's confession in a statement to the police (J 82 824, Maurice Cox's Police Interview, 28th January 1967). The Judge consequently directed the jury to find a verdict of guilty of manslaughter which they did without deliberation. Initially sentenced to life imprisonment, Cox mounted an appeal against this, arguing his original trial was unfair as his state of "acute depression anxiety and despair" were not taken into consideration (J 82/824, Trial Summary, 14th July 1967). As a result, Cox's sentence was changed to a hospital order through which he would be detained at Broadmoor. The Court of Appeal were critical of the fact that the case had been put to a jury as they felt the medical evidence at the original trial was sufficient for Maurice's plea to have been accepted (J 82 824, Judge's Comments at Appeal, 30th November 1967). This case is a reflection of the changes introduced by the *Mental Health Act* (1959). When and if Maurice was released following his hospital order is unknown, however records indicate he died on 1st June 2002 at 84 years old.

3.2.1.3 The Wheddon Family (1974)[4]

Frank Wheddon was born in July 1939 but details of the circumstances surrounding his childhood within the archive files are limited. It is clear though, that he met his wife to be Marion whilst a serving soldier and they were eventually married in July 1964. Marion's sister Lynda told police that Marion's father "never liked Frank and did his best to stop them marrying" (J 206/93, Lynda Maltby's Statement, 4th September 1974). Marion's father Richard Cowell confirmed he had met Frank when they "were both serving in the Royal Fusiliers" and did not approve of their relationship (J 206/93, Richard Cowell's Statement, 4th October 1974). In fact, when he found out they were a couple he "had a row with him" (J 206/93, Richard Cowell's Statement, 4th October 1974). Despite this disapproval, Frank and Marion wed and went on to have four children together – two sons and two daughters, who were aged between four and nine years old at the time of the offence. The family of six resided in Knight Avenue in Gillingham, Kent. Specific details of Frank's employment history are sparse, but the files indicate he worked as a "casual labourer" but struggled to maintain secure and continuous employment (J 206/93, Lynda Maltby's Statement, 4th September 1974). Marion's sister indicated that Frank "seemed unable to care financially for the family and spent money on gambling", meaning the family had "numerous debts", with Marion's family helping them financially over the years (J 206/93, Lynda Maltby's Statement, 4th September 1974). As a result of these financial hardships, Marion worked alongside her sister at some points at Gillingham Electric Laundry to get money for the family.

[4] The archive files relating to Frank Wheddon's case are J 206/93 and J 82/3309.

Frank and Marion's marriage is quite a focus in the files, described throughout as extremely turbulent, with their relationship represented as unhappy and problematic. To those who did not know them on a personal level they appeared to be a "happily married couple", but the descriptions of those who knew them personally differ significantly (J 206/93, Police Constable Winter's Statement, 4th September 1974). The problem underpinning this was said to be the "extreme jealousy" from Frank towards Marion. Her sister stated Frank "hated her to even look at other men", describing "frequent domestic disputes" between the couple (J 206/93 Lynda Maltby's Statement, 4th September 1974). Frank apparently believed Marion "was promiscuous and was having and had had, a number of affairs and consorted with other men" [sic] (J 82/3309, Prosecution's Speech at Sentencing, 17th January 1975), although documents suggest "there is absolutely nothing to suggest that there was any truth in that at all" (J 82/3309, Prosecution's Speech at Sentencing, 17th January 1975). Frank expressed suicidal ideations leading up to the murder, once attempting to electrocute himself, as well as self-harming by cutting his wrists. During an incident shortly before Marion was killed, which the police attended, Frank stated to an officer that he would "kill himself" if they advanced towards him and "would take his life if his wife left him" (J 206/93, Police Sergeant Blackburn's Statement, 5th September 1974).

During the evening of 3rd September 1974, Frank killed Marion by cutting her throat whilst she was in the bath. They had argued earlier in the day and Frank indicated in his police interview that he hit her twice and then "pushed her under" the water. He proceeded to get a knife from the kitchen, with which he cut her across her neck and then, realising "there

would be no chance of them getting back together at all", he cut her wrists (J 206/93, Frank Wheddon's Police Interview, 3rd September 1974). He suggested that he also attempted to cut his own wrists "but didn't have the guts" (J 206/93, Frank Wheddon's Police Interview, 3rd September 1974). After doing this, Frank phoned both Marion's parents separately. He called her father at work, saying: "hello Richard, this is Frank… [*a long pause*] … I have killed your daughter" (J 206/93, Richard Cowell's Statement, 4th October, 1974). Following these phone calls, Frank walked to Gillingham Police Station where he handed himself in. Officers immediately went to the property and found Marion's body in the bath, with bruising across her head and cuts to both wrists, as well as the fatal wound across her neck. The children, who were upstairs at the time of the attack, were found sleeping in their beds by officers.

Frank was said to have been suffering with "morbid jealousy over a considerable period" (J 206/93, Medical Report, 25th November 1974) and at his trial he pleaded not guilty to the murder of Marion. His plea was accepted by the prosecution, meaning he was found guilty of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility with only a summary of facts and the uncontested medical evidence being heard. The Judge ordered life imprisonment; a sentence Frank unsuccessfully appealed against (J 82/3309, Judge's Comments at Sentencing, 17th January 1975). Details of Frank's life following his imprisonment are sparse, although records indicate he died in 1999 aged 60 years old. Following the death of their mother and Frank's arrest, the four children were taken into the care of his brother and sister-in-law who fostered them.

3.2.2 Cases of Familicide

3.2.2.1 The Mulroy Family (1955)[5]

John Rogerson Mulroy was born on 9th February 1920. He was an "illegitimate" child and his discovery of this was apparently "a great psychological shock… and clearly the source of an underlying feeling of inferiority for him" (PCOM 9/2081, Prison Medical Report, 2nd May 1955). His wife, Evelyn Sparks, was born in January 1923 in Mitford Norfolk. It's uncertain how the couple met, but they married on 22nd December 1944 in East Dereham. Five years later the couple had their first child Linda, born on 15th May 1949. Two more children followed: David in 1950 and Peter in 1952. The family resided together at Victoria Street in Dunston, County Durham and John was self-employed, working as a joiner and carpenter involved in various types of property repairs. He was described as a "good workman who always took pride in his work" (PCOM 9/2081, Prison Hospital Report Sent to Department for Public Prosecution, 25th May 1955). Evelyn suffered with "valvular disease of the heart" and from September 1953 to January 1956 was under treatment for "pulmonary tuberculosis" (PCOM 9/2081, Prison Hospital Report Sent to Department for Public Prosecution, 25th May 1955). She was not employed, staying home to look after their three children. Statements within the files suggest John was "worried about money" but "tried to conceal his anxieties from his wife" (PCOM 9/2081, Prison Hospital Report Sent to Department for Public Prosecution, 25th May 1955). Overall, the family appeared to be a "very happy family", with John stating he "never quarrelled with his wife" (ASSI 45/244, Detective Inspector Wilkinson Statement, 24th May 1955).

[5] The archive files relating to John Rogerson Mulroy's case are ASSI 45/244 and PCOM 9/2081.

A medical report suggested John was suffering with "deep depression … expressing vague ideas of suicide and unworthiness" (PCOM 9/2081, Prison Medical Report, 2nd May 1955). Just prior to the killings the children were all suffering with measles (ASSI 45/244, Margaret Mulroy's Statement, 24th May 1955). The exact dates and time of events are unclear, but sometime between the 25th and 28th March 1955 John killed Evelyn and their three children at their family home in Dunston. It is believed he stayed with their bodies for some time after they were killed before notifying anyone of what had happened. Each of the victims were found deceased in their bedrooms, having suffered fatal head injuries from blows to the head with a claw hammer. The youngest child was found in the arms of his mother, while Peter and Linda were in separate beds. John disposed of the claw hammer near Linda's school, saying he had attempted to "put it on the fire, but the head wouldn't burn … I couldn't stand the sight of it" (ASSI 45/244, Detective Inspector Wilkinson's Statement, 24th May 1955). Following the killings John wrote a series of letters addressed to various people, including long letters to the police, his mother and his doctors, as well as clients he was due to start jobs for in the coming days and other people known to the family. The language was emotive, including asking a family friend "please look after Linda's kitten Davids dog and Peters cat. They love their pets" [sic] (PCOM 9/2081, Letter addressed to the Police written by John Mulroy, no date). These letters were written on scraps of paper and left on the mantlepiece above the fireplace. The deaths were revealed when John's mother, Margaret got the bus into Dunston to visit her son, having become worried after he was acting strange when he visited her at her home in Hexham the day before. John met her at the bus stop, where she described him as visibly upset and sobbing. On asking John what was wrong, he replied, "it was too awful" to tell (ASSI 45/244,

Margaret Mulroy's Statement, 24th May 1955). She queried whether it was one of the children and he replied, "it was all of them… and Evelyn is gone too" (ASSI 45/244, Margaret Mulroy's Statement, 24th May 1955). Margaret went to the nearest phone box to contact the police, then taking John back to the house to await their arrival.

John was described as "profoundly depressed" and "unable to give any real account of what had transpired during the previous three days" following his arrest. In his initial interview, he stated: "I don't know how it happened, I must have killed them. I wrote it down for you, it is in the house all written down" - *referring to the letters mentioned previously* (ASSI 45/244, Detective Inspector Wilkinson's Statement, 24th May 1955). Despite his apparent state of confusion, after undertaking various assessments, psychiatrists found him fit to plead at his trial (PCOM 9/2081, Prison Medical Report, 2nd May 1955). He subsequently pleaded not guilty on the grounds of insanity, which the jury accepted, unanimously finding him guilty but insane without even leaving the jury box (Letter from Prison Medical Officer, Durham to the Prison Commissioners, PCOM 9/2081). After this the Judge ordered John to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure at Broadmoor Hospital (PCOM 9/2081, Prison Minutes, 3rd June 1955). Details of John's life following his detainment are sparse, but records indicate he died in April 1997 aged 77 years old.

3.2.2.2 The Dixon Family (1967)[6]

Claude Thomas Dixon was born on 28th October 1928 in Shipdham, Norfolk to parents Elsie and John. He had two siblings - one brother and a younger sister. Claude's father

[6] The archive file relating to Claude Thomas Dixon's case is ASSI 36/572.

owned Grange Farm at Etling Green in Dereham, Norfolk. Claude apparently left school at the age of 15 as "the headmaster of the grammar school that he was attending found that he was unable to concentrate" (ASSI 36/572, Antecedent History, no date). Soon after this he began working for his father on the 170 acres of family farm where he continued working until his arrest. His father states that "apart from the periods of depression which are connected with his long mental history" he was "a very good worker" (ASSI 36/572, Antecedent History, no date). At the age of 33, Claude married Jean Mary Ann Cushion. Jean had been born in 1941, living with her parents and two older sisters in Norwich. The couple married in August 1961 and a year later moved into the bungalow next to the main farmhouse where Claude's parents lived. On 7th May 1962 Jean gave birth to their first child named Hazel. The couple went on to have two more children together, Shirley born on 20th January 1964 and David on 23rd May 1966 (ASSI 36/572, Antecedent History, no date).

Details surrounding the quality of Claude and Jean's marriage in the files are limited. Claude apparently "had a long history of recurrent and relapsing mental illnesses extending back over 10 years" (ASSI 36/572, Prison Medical Report, 21st June 1967). Medical reports state he had been admitted to St. Andrew's Psychiatric Hospital on five separate occasions between 1955 to 1962. During his last admission the was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and it was deemed necessary to treat this with continuous medication of the tranquiliser Largactil. It appears, however, that Claude was using this medication only "spasmodically and/or in inadequate dosage or not at all" (ASSI 36/572, Prison Medical Report, 21st June 1967).

Shortly after 8.15am on the 17th May 1967, Claude entered his parent's house and said to his mother "my wife and family are in heaven" (ASSI 36/572, Claude Dixon's Police Interview, 17th May 1967). Elsie Dixon described him as looking "white and strange" (ASSI 36/572, Elsie Dixon's Statement, 12th June 1967), and she asked him to repeat what he said, which he did. She immediately told her husband, who phoned the police before going straight to Claude's bungalow. There John found Jean's lifeless "blue body" lying in her bed, along with the baby David in his cot. She had been strangled using a leather belt. Eleven-month-old David had also been strangled, with a kitchen knife also inserted into his chest, "pushed into the body as far as the handle" (ASSI 36/572, Detective Sergeant Thompson's Statement, 17th May 1967). As John moved through the bungalow and into the bathroom, he found Hazel and Shirley's bodies together in the bath. Claude's statement described how the girls had both been "bumped" on the head with the tip of a rifle and then submerged under the water until they drowned (ASSI 36/572, Claude Dixon's Police Interview, 17th May 1967). A post-mortem examination found their deaths resulted from drowning.

Claude was arrested for the murders of his family. When interviewed at Dereham Police Station, he stated that "life would be fuller for them, after death in heaven" (ASSI 36/572, Claude Dixon's Police Interview, 17th May 1967). Psychiatric assessments by medical professionals found Claude to have been suffering with "chronic schizophrenia" which, at the time of the offences, was exacerbated by "a superimposed morbid depression" (ASSI 36/572, Prison Medical Report, 21st June 1967). The extent of the impact on his mental state was thought to be considerable and, consequently, he was deemed unfit to plead at

trial and was detained at Her Majesty's pleasure. Claude's future following his detainment is unknown, as no traces could not be identified within the archives or other records.

3.2.2.3 The Bromley Family (1974)[7]

William Alan Bromley was born on 16th March 1916 in Stockport, Cheshire. His father died when he was three during World War I, leaving William to be brought up by his mother and grandparents (J 206/84, Probation Report, 14th May 1974). After attending a private school in Cheshire, he went on to study medicine at St Barts. Medical College, London, qualifying in June 1941. Shortly after this in 1942 William was enlisted in the army, becoming a Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He was discharged from the army in 1946 and went into General Practice in Middlesex until 1953. William married his first wife in 1942 and they had a daughter in 1947. This marriage "began to falter in the early 1950s" when William "having become disillusioned with the pay conditions in the newly formed National Health Service" abandoned medicine and bought a small holding in Norfolk (J 206/84, Probation Report, 14th May 1974). He invited his wife to join him in this venture, but she elected to remain in the family home in Middlesex with their daughter. In 1954 William had yet another change of employment, becoming a ship's surgeon with the Union Castle Line. It is whilst he was employed in this capacity on the "Reine-del-Mar" that William, who was married at the time, met the woman who would later become his second wife (J 206/84, Probation Report, 14th May 1974). In 1956 he left his first wife, with the divorce eventually finalised in 1961. Later the same year, William married Brenda Hermione Miller, who had worked on the ship he served on as a "nursing sister" (J 206/84,

[7] The archive files relating to the case of William Alan Bromley's case are J 206/84 and DPP 2/5400.

Prison Medical Report, 14th May 1974). It is known that Brenda was born in 1927 in Tonbridge, although details about her past within the files are minimal. The couple eventually settled in Gillingham, Kent, where William opened a clinic in Chatham, again working as a General Practitioner. William and Brenda had two children together – Ian David Bromley born in 1965 and Richard William Mackinley Bromley born in 1970.

William was a regular drinker, described as an "alcoholic", whose "breath often smelt of alcohol" and was frequently in an "extremely drunken state" (DPP 2/5400, James MacKenzie's Statement, 5th February 1974). The owner of the local off licence stated that he purchased alcohol regularly at the shop, "sometimes as much as four bottles of whisky in a week" (J 206/84, Edna Lambkin's Statement, 15th March 1974) In 1972, he was disqualified from driving for eighteen months as a result of drink driving and subsequently hired a driver named John Edward Tidman who would transport him wherever he needed to go using Mr Bromley's car. In the years leading up to the tragedy, William described feeling "lousy and depressed" saying he "saw no point in carrying on" (J 206/84 Independent Psychiatrist's Report, 7th May 1974). He was struggling financially, feeling he had "bitten off more than he could chew, with a house, a large garden and two children at private schools" (J 206/84, Probation Report, 14th May 1974). In an interview with a psychiatrist William indicated that "he began to ruminate on his difficulties and could see no way out" (J 206/84, Independent Psychiatrist's Report, 7th May 1974).).

On Thursday 28th February 1974 a general election took place, which was dubbed as a "crisis election" (Sandbrook, 2010). This election came at a time in which there was

significant economic unrest, resulting in a strike by the National Union of Miners (Campbell and Warner. 1985). This election saw the highest amount of press coverage of any election previously, with newspapers dominated by political coverage (Sandbrook, 2010). William stayed up waiting for the results to come in. The election resulted in a hung parliament, with conservative candidate Edward Heath losing his majority. On the day of the election William had gone to the local off licence and purchased a bottle of Haig Whiskey and a bottle of 'Johnie Walker' Whiskey" [sic] (J 206/84, Edna Lambkin's Statement, 15th March 1974). In an interview with the police, he described how:

> when it got to about the eighth one it seemed to be more Labour by then than anything else. I thought that under Wilson the country would be in a worse mess. There was no point in my poor little sons growing up in that atmosphere because the country will be bankrupt by then with more strikes. (J 206/84, Detective Chief Inspector Watson's Statement, 4th March 1974).

Then he said, "on the spur of the moment I did it. I shot the wife first, then the elder boy, and then the younger boy" (J 206/84, Detective Chief Inspector Watson's Statement, 4th March 1974). Following this William had apparently intended to shoot himself, but that he "must have passed out" (J 206/84, Detective Chief Inspector Watson's Statement, 4th March 1974). The murders were discovered on the 1st March 1974 by the Bromley's neighbour Mrs Walker. She noticed a parcel at the front door, as well as a newspaper and uncollected milk. While attempting to ring the doorbell, she noticed "Dr Bromley lying on the floor with a shotgun lying next to him" (J 206/84, Mary Walker's Statement, 1st March 1974). Mrs Walker immediately went to get help from a neighbour, who entered the house

and upstairs found Mrs Bromley and the boys dead in their bedrooms. When the police arrived, William was still "lying on the floor, face down … groaning and mumbling continually". He apparently "smelt strongly of intoxicating liquor" (J 206/84, Police Constable Johnston's Statement, 1st March 1974). Brenda Bromley had suffered two gunshot wounds to the head, which William explained was due to the fact that when he came back into the bedroom after "shooting the little boy she seemed to make a noise", leading him to shoot her again (J 206/84, Detective Chief Inspector Watson's Statement, 4th March 1974). Ian and Richard both died in their separate bedrooms, each suffering one fatal gunshot to the head.

William was arrested and charged with the murders. During assessments carried out whilst in custody, he was found to be suffering from "depression complicated by possible early dementia and alcoholism" (J 206/84, Independent Psychiatrist's Report, 7th May 1974). Psychiatrists suggested this depression, alongside other factors and his dissatisfaction with the election results, "convinced him to a delusional degree that a Labour government would bring unbearable suffering to his family" (J 206/84, Independent Psychiatrist's Report, 7th May 1974). William guilty to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility, which was accepted by both Judge and the prosecution and so was not tested before a jury *(Birmingham Daily Post*, 1974). He was sentenced on 11th June 1974 to detention under a hospital order and was sent to St Andrews Hospital in Northampton. He died just two years later in October 1976 whilst still detained at the hospital.

This chapter has provided an overview of the methods used when conducting this research project. Consideration for benefits and limitations of using archival research was given as well as referencing how these have impacted and influenced my methods.

Each of the six cases outlined throughout this chapter differ significantly regarding the specific details of the killings. There was a brief summary of each of the six cases selected for this research which provided contextual backgrounds and details to support the findings which are presented in the two upcoming chapters The common factor which draws them all together is that they are all cases of domestic homicide committed by a male perpetrator. The next two chapters explore the data extracted from the archives, looking at each of the cases in more detail. The data chapters present findings of how the female and child victims were represented as well as understandings of family dynamics including the role of the father.

Chapter 4 – Data Analysis – Representations of Women

This chapter will examine the ways in which female victims are represented across the six cases of fatal domestic violence. These women were aged between 26 and 58 years old. The overall findings from this research indicate that female victims across the cases studied are generally represented in similar ways between 1955 and 1974, despite the "significant social, cultural and economic developments" occurring in mid-twentieth century Britain (Langhamer, 2005; 342), which might be expected to influence such representations. To effectively interpret constructions of gender, however, it is important to contextualise and appreciate the "shifting and contested nature of aspects of femininity and women's experiences in mid-twentieth century Britain" (Seal, 2010; 95). With this in mind, this chapter will consider the data in relation to these social shifts, which played a significant factor in how women's roles in society were perceived, assessing how this is evident in interpretations of the six women in the cases considered. Throughout this chapter, representations of female victims across the six cases will be explored in depth, examining aspects such as discussion of their physical appearance, as well as their behaviour and mannerisms. There will be a discussion surrounding the notion that these women are represented in some ways as 'deserving victims' and in some ways responsible for their own deaths. The most prominent way women are represented in the case files is through a failure to fit into the 'ideal' expected from society in their roles as women, wives and mothers.

All these factors considered together contribute to understandings of how their gender was perceived at the time and how these representations broadly reflected the period across the mid-twentieth century. The most prominent theme in relation to this is the ways in which these six women were represented as portraying symptoms or behaviours linked with a concept known as 'housewife syndrome' (Adams, 2020; 127). The following section of the chapter considers this element of representation, which includes presentations of the women's relationship to paid employment, their association with their husband, and their role as mothers. Across the chapter the conformity of female victims to the 'ideals' of femininity across this period will be assessed, looking at how representations incorporated ways in which these women were perceived to deviate from these social norms and the impact this had on how they were defined as women, as wives and as mothers, but also as victims of domestic homicide.

4.1 Housewife Syndrome

Some feminist literature indicates that women throughout the mid-twentieth century were often portrayed as showing symptoms of a concept referred to as 'housewife syndrome'. This syndrome was highlighted as a mental disorder in which housewives suffered "from supposed bouts of madness and enigmatic conditions, such as hysteria or neurosis, that plagued women who showed unhappiness in their stereotypical role of homemaker in the mid-twentieth century" (Adams, 2020; 127). This concept developed on Friedan's 'Feminine Mystique', which proposed that American housewives in this period were experiencing psychological illness as a result of "domestic boredom and stultification" (Haggett, 2012; 1). Haggett's work focuses predominantly on women in Great Britain, but

closely reflects that of Friedan's work on American housewives. The correspondences in the work of these authors indicates a similarity in understandings of experiences of housewives across Western cultures in the mid-twentieth century and their thinking was influential in the development of second wave feminism (Thornham, 2001).

Expectations of women in the postwar period between the 1940s and 1950s put pressures on women "to not only be the 'perfect mother' but also the 'happy housewife" (Beaumont, 2017; 149). Even prior to discussions of 'housewife syndrome', hysteria was medically attributed to women. This "psychological issue" presented as symptoms such as "anxiety, nervousness, depression, headaches, insomnia, fainting or fatigue" in women (Adams, 2020; 134). This idea of female hysteria originated in Ancient Greece, where ideas around female madness related to positioning of the womb and the uterus (Tasca et al., 2012). Whilst manifesting differently during various historical periods, this notion as a dominant concept in understanding or portraying women is something which has been extensive and long standing. During the 1940s, there was a noticeable decline in diagnoses of hysteria in women (Adams, 2020) but this changed significantly after the war, when "female neurosis gradually resurfaced as men returned from World War II and women were thrust back into their role as the homemaker" (Adams, 2020; 133). Throughout the war women had played a significant role within society, but once it was over it was assumed they "would willingly dedicate themselves to family life to the exclusion of all other interests" (Beaumont, 2017; 148). This sudden shift of expected roles in society within this period potentially impacted millions of women across England, including those studied within this thesis, particularly

Florence Windle and Evelyn Mulroy who died in the 1950s and so were most impacted by societal shifts after the wars had ended.

What is apparent across existing research then, is the emphasis on the housewife role as a predominant factor in relation to female mental health, particularly in the mid-twentieth century. The case files indicate a number of features through which women are represented as suffering with "housewife syndrome" in the descriptions of female victims in the cases I explore in this research. Almost all of the most common symptoms of "housewife syndrome" previously mentioned occur throughout the cases. In the mid-twentieth century period there was an overarching "societal pressure to be perfect, happy housewives" (Catt, 2014; 63). The women in these cases though, are represented as frequently moaning, as well as being particularly emotional, with frequent references to this for all women. Marion Wheddon, in particular, is described as frequently "crying … she broke down … upset and trembling" (J 206/93, Police Constable Winter's Statement, 4th September 1974).

Women's expressions of emotion, however, were often viewed in contradictory ways during this period. In a survey carried out in the 1970s looking at stereotypes of gender, a majority of men stated that an ideal woman is someone who is "emotional", a characteristic that was "predominate on the traditional lists of femininity" (Clifton et al., 1976; 144). The idea of being 'emotional' then, can be a desired feminine trait, but this significantly contrasts with the opinions expressed of women in this research, whose emotive behaviour is presented as negative. Looking at the ways in which the emotional behaviour is portrayed, therefore, is important, since it can be both a positive or negative trait for

women. Despite the societal expectation of an 'ideal' woman across these periods having an emotional side, the women in these cases are represented negatively throughout for their emotive behaviours and the ways they communicate their emotions. Instead of this being a desired trait, as the literature suggests it sometimes seen, for these women it is quite the opposite, and is presented as undesirable.

The type of behaviours attributed as disturbing behaviour in women "were often commonplace expressions of emotional distress" (Adams, 2020; 128). Florence Windle, in particular, is described as possessing the most extreme behavioural traits associated with the 'housewife syndrome', being described as "very neurotic" (ASSI 13/270, George Cooper's Statement, 27th February 1952), as well as "suffering from symptoms of manic depression" (PCOM 9/2512, Prison Minutes, no date). Alongside depression, she also "complained of severe headaches and insomnia" (ASSI 13/270, George Cooper's Statement, 27th February 1952). Florence Windle's neurotic behavioural characteristics were most extreme, but other victims were also described in statements to the police as having depression, and all are presented as unhappy, particularly in relation to their role as housewives. Marion Wheddon was presented as "complaining of depression … seeming more tired and more depressed than ever before" (J 206/93, Lynda Maltby's Statement, 4th September 1974). All of the behaviours these women are presented as displaying are strongly associated with traits relating to 'housewife syndrome'. They were represented then, as housewives who were largely unhappy, as reflected in their behaviour prior to their deaths.

Literature on the housewife often emphasises the family (Ritchie, 2010; 30). This is supported by Webster (1998) who observed that relational identifies, such as being a wife and a mother, controlled women's perceptions of themselves, as well as the way in which they were observed by others. This is apparent for the women in this research who are predominantly represented by their role as a mother and as a wife, rather than as individuals with their own identities. This is shown in the Mulroy case, for example, in which Evelyn Mulroy was referred to as "the wife" (ASSI 45/244, John Havis' Statement, 29th April 1955). Admittedly this individual did not know the family personally, however, the recurrence of the phrase 'the wife' rather than the use of personal names by many commentators suggests that the women were largely defined within the case files by their marital status. Repetitions of this phrase are apparent across all six cases, with the women consistently identified through their relationship to their husbands. Marion Wheddon, for example, is positively assessed on her ability as a wife to her husband, being labelled a "good wife" (J 206/93, Consultant Psychiatrist's Report, 9th September 1974). Florence Windle, in contrast, is considered a bad wife for her failure to perform domestic duties, as evident in the observation that "he had to do the shopping as his wife never did any" (ASSI 13/270, Harry Hunt's Statement, 27th February 1952). There is less judgement of Evelyn Mulroy but in her case too it is commented on that "he had to do much of the housework and caring for the children himself" because of her ill health (PCOM 9/2081, Prison Hospital Report Sent to Department of Public Prosecution, 25th May 1955). It was also stressed that this was on top of his more typical male role of working and providing for the family.

In each of the cases the women are repeatedly through their relationship to their husband, either as 'the wife' or as "his wife". As well as this stripping of their individual identities through aspects such as their names, the use of "his wife" also foregrounds the women as possessions of their husband. These phrases are frequently used by medical professionals, as well as the police in reports, but also occur in transcripts of interviews with witnesses and family members, showing a non-personal approach even from those who knew the victims. In the Dixon case, for example, he is asked when interviewed "did your wife pass away first or your children" (ASSI 36/57, Detective Sergeant Thompson's Statement, 17th May 1967).

This presentation of the wives through their marital relationship and the different ways the press responded to incidents of wife killing or familicide than other sorts of murders are also evident in media coverage. In the Dixon case, for example, initial press reports were published before it was known that the suspect in police custody was Elsie's husband. In these early accounts the case is presented as a "multiple murder" with an unnamed man "helping police with the enquiries" (*Reading Evening Post*, 1967). Greater sensationalism is evident in these reports, with the headline in the *Daily Mirror* (1967) captioning the case as one of "death horror". In these reports Elsie's role as a "mother" takes central stage, with this descriptor opening the headline, and the story featuring on page one of the *Reading Evening Post* (1967). A brief reference to Claude at the end of that piece, which simply states where he works, identifies him through his relationship to her, as 'the dead woman's husband'. In subsequent reports, however, accounts are much briefer, are no longer front-page news, and Elsie has become 'his wife' (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 1967,

Daily Mirror, 1967). This shift is also evident in the Cox case, which was initially perceived to be an accident because of the explosion. An initial report ran with the headline "Housewife killed, her husband injured in home explosion" *(Torbay Express*, 1967). By the time he is charged with murder though, Daisy has become 'his wife' and 'his wife's body' (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 1967).

4.2 Employment

The role of housewives and women's relationship with employment changed significantly during the period under consideration and the concept of "housewife syndrome" was intended, as was *The Feminist Mystique*, to challenge assumptions that women should be fulfilled by their roles as wives and mothers (Thornham, 2001). The 1950s initiated a "revolution in married women's participation in the labour market" (Webster, 1998; 129). This rise in women's employment came as a result of an increasing demand for workforce during the Second World War. The War "stimulated fundamental changes in the status of British women workers" (Smith, 1984 ;944). Throughout the 1950s there was significant concern surrounding the employment of "the working wife" and the negative impact paid work may have on her children (Webster, 1998; 130). This theory was outlined by Bowlby (1952) in his report *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, published on behalf of the World Health Organisation (WHO). The report emphasises the importance of motherhood, indicating that children who are deprived of attention from their mothers from a young age are more likely to develop a "delinquent" character (Bland, 2020; 23). This presented anxieties for women and how potential employment may have a direct impact on their families, specifically the development of their children.

As well as the factor of family life impacting women's chances of employment, legislation also prevented many women from entering paid employment across the 1950s and 1960s. Prior to the Second World War, a marriage bar was effective for the majority of women employed in both public and private sectors (Smith, 1984). The enforcement of a marriage bar made it mandatory for female employees to resign from a company if they got married, alongside preventing married women applying for vacancies within a company until its abolishment in 1973 (McCarthy, 2014). This marriage bar was suspended during the Second World War and the employment of women substantially rose, including of married women (Smith, 1984). The developments across this period largely defined women's employment by their duty to their home. Women who were employed were labelled as "working wives … a hybrid which signalled the way in which their employment was tacked on to their familial identity" (Webster, 1998; 129). This suggests that society at this time identified the primary duty of a woman as a homemaker, with paid work subordinate to that of the housewife role. This supports the idea earlier in the chapter that women in this period were thought of in relation to their duties to their husband, family and home, rather than being identified as individuals. After the temporary suspension of the marriage bar during the Second World War, there were notable differences in the pattern of female employment. Rather than marriage causing women to leave paid work, now it was the birth of a first child (Webster, 1998). This created a "bimodal work pattern" in which women would leave to have children and then return to work once their children were older (Lewis, 2003; 261).

The understanding of the role of women significantly changed with the dawn of the 1960s "due to the prevalence of various social movements" (Adams, 2020; 146). There was an identifiable increase in the awareness of the role of the 'housewife' as limiting women's prospects for self-development. This came as the rise of second-wave feminism began to challenge existing ideas of gender roles, particularly that of women as housewives. The start of the 1960s bought about a new generation of women who were born after the war had ended, who "began to define the home as an oppressive, over-private and stultifying place for women" (Webster, 1998; 149). This new generation contributed to a considerable shift in attitudes towards and expectations of women, especially in relation to employment opportunities. Johnson (2010; 238) acknowledges that "women in the 1960s and 1970s were fighting for access to part time work and more flexible working hours", although stating that despite a growing interest from women in entering the labour market, it was not on the same basis as that of male employment. The understanding of women as housewives had shifted significantly within the period considered then, and the notion of the home "foreshadowed the view of the family and domestic labour as the main site of women's oppression" (Webster, 1998; 149). Five of the women in the cases looked at across the six cases researched were full-time housewives and had no form of paid employment at the time of their deaths. The exception to this is Isabella Wheddon who was said to have had periods of part-time employment at Gillingham Electric Laundry (J 206/93, Lynda Maltby's Statement, 4th September 1974). Brenda Bromley had been employed during the Second World War, which is where she met her husband William Bromley, when she was a "nursing sister in the ship which he served" (J 206/86, Medical

Report, 14th May 1974). Within the files there are no references to any of the other women being employed at any stage of their lives.

Overall, there is little change in the way the women victims in these cases were represented over time, despite the occurrence of significant social, political and economic developments in relation to women's lives and understandings of gender roles. There is one notable exception to this, though, which relates to changing context of women working. Despite there being expectations that women in the mid-twentieth century period should maintain a household well, there is a suggestion in one case that, at least by the 1970s, women could be too much of a housewife. Brenda Bromley, for example, is spoken about negatively in relation to the time that she spends at home, described as being "too tied to the house" (DPP 2/5400, Janet Sturges' Statement, 4th March 1974). This is the only suggestion, however, across all the six cases where this is apparent. It is interesting such a reference occurred only in the 1970s, when attitudes of women within the home and their roles and responsibilities may have shifted, meaning women could be perceived as too closely tied to their housewife role. A woman who was thought to be too closely tied to the home is described by Lloyd and Johnson (2010; 10) as being a "victim of modernisation by embracing it too intensely". The comment about Brenda Bromley being too attached to her house significantly contrasts the 'ideal housewife' picture painted by society across this period, and particularly in the 1950s (Haggett, 2009). The representation of her as being too invested in her home creates the sense that even when she carried out tasks expected of her in her housewife role, this was still not seen as 'acceptable' behaviour. In this period then, contradictory expectations around the role of women as housewives

potentially created the sense women could not win either way. Being committed to the house and family was seen as 'too attached' but, it could be argued then, that expectations of women at this point were difficult to achieve, given the fine balance between expectations of appropriate domestic behaviour combined with the notion women should have a role outside the house. This is the only significant difference in representations of the women in the 1970s cases, a period after the stereotype of the 1950s housewife circulated (Haggett, 2009) and when the influence of second wave feminism was more evident (Evans, 1995). Similar perceptions to those identified in the Bromley case were evident in the phrase 'just a housewife', which Oakley (2018) found was in "common currency" in the 1970s in a book first published in 1974, the same year Brenda Bromley died. Representations of Marion Windle, however, in the same year, demonstrate that such perceptions were far from universal, with women in these cases judged both for being too close to the home and for being independent outside of it. This distinction in representations of Brenda Bromley could, therefore, be attributed to this development and progression in understandings of gender roles in the mid-twentieth century.

The minimal evidence of changes to the way women were represented within these cases between the 1950s and the 1970s is an interesting finding. Despite the development and growth of second wave feminism over that period, then, which is recognised as radically altering attitudes towards women's domestic roles and their relationship to work (Thornham, 2001), these wives continued to be presented primarily as housewives and assessed for their performance in that role. It is ironic in a way that the concept of "housewife syndrome", which was associated with feminist challenges to prevailing

gender expectations, should be so evident in representations of the women throughout the period. Still, then, in the 1970s the "feminine mystique" that women should be fulfilled by their domestic roles was strongly evident in portrayals of wives who were killed by their husbands and there is a sense that the developments of second wave feminism simply created additional expectations for women to fulfil (Friedan, 1963). So, Marion Wheddon's need to work, in part occasioned by her husband's lack of steady employment, was commented upon, but for Brenda Bromley her unhappiness was associated with an over attachment to her domestic role and a lack of independent interests outside the home.

4.3 Nagging Wives

Throughout the two files relating to the Bromley case, Brenda's personality was referred to negatively, particularly through allusions that "she was not very happy" (DPP 2/5400, Janet Sturges' Statement, 4th March 1974). Brenda Bromley is often portrayed as unhappy in her role, especially in relation to her attachment to her housewife role. She is often referred to in this way, with suggestions her mood appeared to be "somewhat down in the dumps" (DPP 2/5400, Michael Patterson's Statement, 3rd March 1974). Such sentiments are also evident across the other cases too, with the most frequently noted reference being to suggestions from people who knew the victims that they were "not very happy" in their roles as housewives (DPP 2/5400, Janet Sturges' Statement, 4th March 1974).

The unhappiness apparently felt by the women was considered to present itself mostly through their behaviour, particularly in that they were frequently "moaning" (ASSI 13/270, Charles Clark Statement, 27th February 1952). This recurring theme of unhappiness

expressed through incessant moaning is evident to some degree across all six cases, with multiple references to the wives 'complaining' or 'nagging,' particularly to their husbands. It is in the Bromley and Windle cases though, that the most frequent examples of this behaviour are portrayed. Brenda Bromley's unhappiness, in particular, is suggested to be evident through her exhibiting nagging behaviour. A police report on the case offered the judgement that there was a "strong indication that she was something of a nagger and constantly complained about all sorts of matters which affected the marriage" (DPP 2/5400, Report of the Trial, 26th April 1974). It is Brenda, then, that is spoken about the most negatively of all the wives in terms of her apparent unhappiness and nagging behaviour, with the suggestion that she was "constantly complaining about almost everything" (DPP 2/5400, Janet Sturges' Statement, 4th March 1974). Other examples of 'nagging' within the files occur particularly in the Windle case, with Francis telling police multiple times that Florence was "constantly moaning" and "had been nagging at me for a long time and has been making my life a misery" (ASSI 13/270, Detective Inspector Bithery's Statement, 27th February 1952).

Polls conducted in the second third of the twentieth century highlight women nagging as a prominent concern of men in their perceptions of relationships and romantic love (Stearns and Knapp, 1993), so it was clearly an important concept in the period considered. In contradiction to much feminist scholarship, some male commentators even into the twenty-first century suggest that women who persistently 'nag' "provoke men into displaying natural aggression" (see Robinson, 2004 on Felson, 2002). This was evident frequently across the twentieth century as well, especially in cases of domestic homicide in which the

partial defence of provocation could result in a manslaughter conviction as a result of the "nagging or general unpleasantness of the wife" (Williamson, 2020; 500). Whilst the apparent nagging of the female victims in these cases was not used to build the grounds for a partial defence, the mental health of male perpetrators instead forming the grounds for mitigation, judgement of their wives' behaviours are invoked to support their depression or mental ill health. The overwhelming sense from these cases is that those women who were said to be 'nagging' presented a significant burden to their marriages, placing strain on their husband's mental wellbeing. The ways in which they are represented as 'nagging wives' then, functions as a "provoking factor" which was suggested more or less directly to have played a role in causing their deaths, as well as going against expectations of the ideal wife (Williamson, 2020; 500), as I will explore in more depth later in this chapter.

4.4 Physical Appearance

Representations of women often rely on descriptions and assessments of their physical appearance, a facet of the objectification that is a central concept in contemporary feminist theory, although it is often inadequately defined (Papadaki, 2010) and so it is important, then, to consider how aspects of the women's physical appearances were represented and impacted social understandings of them as women. One particularly striking feature of commentary on the physical appearance of women within the cases examined is that it is minimal. This is notable because much research highlights how physical appearances play an important role in relation to the construction of identities, making this an important site for constructions and representations of femininity" (Ritchie, 2010; 155).

In the mid-twentieth century particularly, there was a significant focus on style, especially within magazines, which was the result of an increase in the "space devoted to fashion, beauty and style in a post-war era" (Ritchie 2010; 154). This, alongside social developments which impacted the home and domesticity, resulted in female appearances being observed more closely. Seal (2010; 114) highlights how the "ideal feminine performance for a young-working-class woman entailed a visible effort to appear well groomed and attractive, without being too glamorous and therefore 'common'", something also outlined by Tinkler (2006). This was associated with the emergence of a new role for women, especially within advertising, that of mannequin, a passive social being who existed solely to look good (Millum, 1975). This co-existed with the previously dominant female representation as the housewife.

Despite these developments, there is a noticeable lack of focus on the physical appearance of the women in the cases I examined, although when this is evident it is largely suggestive that these women did not conform to the standards of beauty and concern for physical appearances increasingly illustrated in magazines of the time. The women are portrayed as individuals who did not try to meet these standards, not making effort with their clothing or their general physical appearance. For these reasons, the women in these cases are constructed as failing to meet society's ideals of womanhood in their physical appearance, but this also seems to have implications for their roles as housewives. The upcoming sections will explore this further and look at how physical representations of the female victims appear across the six cases.

In terms of the women's clothing there are frequent references to dressing gowns or other nightwear, which subtly acts to cast doubt on the effectiveness of these women as housewives, compounding representations which associate them with features of housewife syndrome. Four out of five of the women are referred to as wearing attire described as "bedclothes", "nightclothes", "night attire" or a "nightgown". The perception created is that these women were somehow scruffy or dowdy and unconcerned with their appearance to others. This is yet another way, then that the women in these cases were not seen as conforming to ideals of femininity in this era and were not presenting themselves in a way which society expected them to as women at this time.

The dressing gown featured in popular culture during this time as a symbol of poor housecraft. One example of the way in which the co-existence of the "mannequin" and the "housewife" created standards for women to conform to in relation to both their domestic role and their physical appearance occurs the 1957 film *Woman in a Dressing Gown*. Here the 'ideal woman' was based on both physical appearance and expected roles. The character of Georgie, for example, is seen to be "serene, sexually attractive and mature" (Williams, 2003; 143). The character Amy, on the other hand, is shown in a juxtaposed way, represented negatively based on her appearance, but also lacking in her abilities as a housewife. Throughout the film she is seen to be wearing an "unerotic shapeless old housecoat" or dressing gown (Williams, 2003; 143), which forms part of her portrayal as a housewife who is essentially "anything but the 1950s domestic goddess" (Williams, 2008; 292). Throughout the film, her appearance reflects the consistency of her inability to adequately maintain her home, with dirty laundry and washing up a physical representation

of this failure as a housewife (Williams, 2003). Women who did not, or who were unable to, perform the tasks within the house expected of them "signalled their lack of respectability and a failure to keep up with modern society" (Giles, 2005; 72). The symbolic nature of the dressing gown worn in this film presents Amy as a scruffy individual who is struggling with the feminine roles expected of her, particularly in relation to the household duties and physical appearance.

Representations of the women in my cases show some similarity with the symbolism of Amy's character. Clothing could convey messages about women's abilities in the domestic realm in various ways. The magazine *Home and Country* in 1955, for example, referred to a housecoat as "a real working overall" (Ritchie, 2010; 164) This construction of a housecoat suggests it was worn, among women of a certain class at least, as a type of uniform signalling that they were working within their home, and their housework was perceived as a 'real' job (Ritchie, 2010). Night clothes, however, particularly in women who were not otherwise portrayed sexually or as meeting standards of beauty, conveyed a sense of not caring about physical appearances and having a slovenly approach to the domestic role. Portrayals of them wearing dressing gowns or night attire, then, conforms to the implied symbolism in 'Woman in a Dressing Gown', rather than the working uniform suggested in *Home and Country*. The implication is they are scruffy and fail to make an effort with their appearance.

All of the female victims considered were housewives, and much was made of this in documents relating to the cases, but there are no references to them taking part in any kind

of household chores or fulfilling their expected roles. Indeed, as has previously been mentioned, in several cases attention was drawn to the fact that they did not do so, were unhappy in this role, or that their husband had to perform domestic tasks. Crime scene photographs exist only for some of the cases in the 1970s, giving an insight into the domestic lives of the families which contradicts the wider portrayals of the women as inadequate of unhappy housewives. Brenda Bromley's house is the most clean and tidy, presenting a well-cared for image at odds with descriptions of her more generally. Washing sits neatly folded on a sideboard on the landing and the children's toys downstairs are tidied away to the side of the hall. One of the boy's bedrooms is very tidy, while the other has toys and books strewn around the bed, although there is the sign of maternal care with a bowl placed by the side of bed as the child has been ill. The Wheddon home, whose kitchen is photographed, is slightly more cluttered, but there are signs of domestic chores being undertaken, with washing hanging to dry and mats laid out neatly on the table. There are several photographs of the Mulroy home, who's small two-up-two-down terrace house is cluttered and shows signs of wear in places. The house is generally clean though, especially the children's bedroom, and much of the clutter is related to domestic life, such as washing hanging across the rooms to dry.

The idea that the dressing gown was a symbol of a failure to fulfil the role of housewife well is further indicated through the sense of negative judgement that often accompanies such descriptions. This is particularly evident with Brenda Bromley, whose performance as a housewife is probably the most thoroughly assessed in the case files. It is not just that she is wearing a dressing gown but that she is willing to be seen by others dressed in this

way and at unacceptable times of the day. Her neighbour, for example observes the "she wasn't dressed" and had been "in and out of bed all day" (J 206/84, Mary Walker's Statement, 1st March 1974). There was also comment that, prior to her murder, Brenda had been in "her dressing gown" as she answered the door to a neighbour in the middle of the day (J 206/84, John Tidman's Statement, 3rd March 1974).

Beyond this focus on the female victims' clothing, there is little reference to their physical appearance, contributing to the general sense that they are represented minimally with a lack of depth. Two references refer to the weight and the build of the women in the cases, mainly in post-mortem reports. Brenda Bromley, for example, is described as "well-nourished" (J 206/84, Forensic Pathologist's Report, 2nd March 1974). Marion Wheddon's body is also described by the pathologist, who states she was "a rather heavily built woman" (J 206/93, Post-mortem Report, 4 September 1974). More broadly, too, though there are references to Marion's weight, with suggestions she was "worried about her weight", and later "still worried about her weight" (J 206/93, General Practitioner Alexander Holmes' Statement, 6th September 1974).

The women, then, figure neither as adequate housewives diligently performing their domestic roles, nor as mannequins, or ladies of leisure, caring for and exhibiting their feminine beauty. In keeping with the common cultural trope of the "Madonna", though, they are strongly represented as asexual in references to their clothing, their lives and their bodies (Welldone, 1998). Corporal descriptions, particularly of any female features, are very minimal and there is almost nothing within the files which sexualises these women in

any way. Their nightwear, although frequently referred to, is not the kind of skimpy lingerie commonly associated with sexualised representations of femininity (Scott, 2010). Webster (1998; 106) indicates that women who were raised between the wars were subject to "shame and secrecy surrounding sexuality" and it could be suggested that these cases reflect this notion of secrecy and shame. Supporting this, Brooke (2001; 775) highlights that in Richard Hoggart's book *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), he describes the mother figure as a woman with an: "asexual quality to her… will age early, that at thirty, after having two or three children, she will have lost most of her sexual attraction; that between thirty-five and forty she rapidly becomes the shapeless figure the family knows as 'our mam'.

This one-dimensional view of the role of women from Hoggart, which has overlap with the concept of the Madonna within representations of femininity, reflects well in some respects how the women within this thesis are presented. There is only one reference in any of the files to the women as sexually active. This appears in a deposition from Marion Wheddon's General Practitioner in which he discloses that she was "worried in case she was pregnant" (J 206/93, General Practitioner Alexander Holmes' Statement, 6th September 1974). It is also mentioned in this deposition that she was taking the contraceptive pill in the time before her death. Marion was the youngest of the victims and was also born following the end of the Second World War. Her death occurred in the 1970s and so this could indicate shifting societal understandings of women, particularly relating to sex, between the 1950s and the 1970s. It may also, however, reflect the defence of her husband which relied on him suffering from morbid jealousy, thus making the question of sexuality and sexual activity more central to the narrative developed to mitigate his

responsibility. Marion is not represented through the lens of the "whore" or the "vamp", however, which is commonly applied to victims of sexual violence (Benedict, 1992). Her husband's jealousy was not presented as resulting from provocation but as a mental aberration, with the case files emphasising this was not the result of sexual promiscuity on Marion's part. Apart from this example though, references to the women's sex lives are absent, or suggestive of a lack of sexual activity. The Cox's, for example, were said to have an "unsatisfactory" sexual life, although this apparently did not "worry him unduly" Maurice (ASSI 36/570, Prison Hospital Report, 16th March 1967). Along with the other elements discussed this contributes to the asexual presentation of the female victims in these cases representation. These women are certainly mothers rather than lovers, and housewives rather than sex objects, but their inadequacies in the domestic sphere and their unhappiness in this role, mean they do not quite conform to the idealised Madonna stereotype either.

4.5 Provoking Behaviours and Deserving Victims

In terms of classic characterisations through which women are commonly represented there is a sense that the women in these cases fit more within the label of 'shrew' than that of the "Madonna", especially in relation to the nagging behaviour discussed earlier. The shrew is a longstanding cultural trope in literature, historically understood as a married woman who is a "turbulent wife". The emergence of 'shrew' is first acknowledged in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale* in 1386 but is most famously recognised in *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare in 1623 (Komine, 2016). Women who are described as a shrew often portray particular behaviours, such as "railing or scolding or other perverse

or malignant behaviour" (Simms, 2016; 35). Other interpretations support this definition, elaborating further and suggesting that in literature the shrew was a "brawling scold, who nagged and reproached her husband constantly" (Mangalam, 2021; 196).

Whilst the more extreme or bawdy elements of 'the shrew' are not really evident in representations of the female victims in these cases, there are elements of this through their portrayal as nagging wives. As previously discussed, this is most evident with Brenda Bromley and Florence Windle, for whom frequent references to their persistent nagging combined with their expressed unhappiness towards their roles as housewives, correlates with some aspects of historical literary representations of a 'shrew'.

A key element in the construction of a compelling narrative about a crime in news reports is the attribution of blame (Chibnall, 1977). This becomes even more important within the narratives created in court where a person's liberty, or even life for some of the cases considered here, may depend on this. As referenced previously, the nagging behaviour that 'shrews' possess can be seen as provoking their husbands to violence, and this is long evident in cultural representations as well. Literature exploring attitudes to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century marriage highlights that men in this period "seldom bothered to deny that they beat their wives: rather they focused on their spouse's disobedience since that 'justified' the discipline" (Hunt, 2007; 18). Whilst not in such explicit forms, the notion that women who exhibited elements of 'shrew-like' behaviours were seen as to some degree deserving, or inevitable, victims of violence can be detected in these cases**.** Literature suggests that across many periods there was a sense of entitlement from the men

who ‘tamed’ their ‘shrew’ wives through violence (Gurr, 1981; Weiner, 2004), The construction of the relationship between female nagging and male violence in my cases is more subtle and nuanced than this, but there is the perception that violence is an understandable, if not ideal, response to such behaviour, and even more so that it is an element which would cause depression and mental ill health in men, which itself would mitigate their responsibility for their fatal violence.

The partial culpability of wives for the violence inflicted on them is also evident in broader suggestions that they are somewhat ‘deserving’ of the fatal outcome, which is evident to some degree across all cases. The suggestion is often subtle, but there is a sense that violence or hostility towards them from their husbands came as a direct result of their behaviours. Often this is nagging, but other behaviours referenced throughout this chapter also play a role, including not being seen as adequately maintaining their physical appearance to societal standards, or lacking enjoyment in and attachment to their roles as housewives. All these traits support the notion discussed above that these women were portrayed as possessing characteristics associated with ‘housewife syndrome’ (Adams, 2020). Whilst it is true that many of these references occur in statements from the men themselves that their wife was displaying behaviours which drove them to kill them, they also feature to some degree in other commentators’ assessments.

Richardson and May (1999; 309) highlight that social definitions of violence “revolve around culpability, victimisation and what is deemed socially appropriate behaviour in particular contexts”. Relating this back to the cases studied within this thesis, I argue that

across the files there is a sense, similar to that identified by D'Cruze et al., 2006), the people investigating are querying '*why was she murdered*' more than asking the question of '*why did he do it'* (D'Cruze et al. 2006). I think that this is highlighted particularly within these cases, as there are extensive discussions surrounding the mental capacity of the perpetrator, but with a particular focus on certain factors associated with the spousal relationship or the behaviour of their wives which may have impacted their mental state. There is the suggestion within the narratives of these cases then, that some individuals may be more deserving of violence than others on the basis of their 'behavioural responsibility' for risk avoidance, putting the onus on victims to monitor their own behaviours to keep peace and avoid being killed (Richardson and May, 2006). I argue that within the cases discussed within this thesis, there is evidence of strongly judgemental attitudes surrounding this sense of behavioural responsibility of the victims, and particularly from medical professionals. In psychiatric reports, the female victims were strongly displayed as portraying these problematic behaviours, fuelling interpretations that to some extent this warranted the violent endings they received, making them 'deserving victims'.

So the construction of male mental ill health in these cases rested on longstanding cultural conceptions of female deviance or nonconformity, through notions such as 'hysteria', 'housewife syndrome' and 'the nagging wife'. Not only are the women represented as not conforming to ideal standards of femininity or womanhood, but this is subtly implied to have caused their husband's mental ill health. Consequently, they also fail to meet the requirements of the 'ideal victim', despite the fact they are respectable women (Christie, 1986). This reduces their position in the 'hierarchy of victimisation', something which

enables the mitigating pleas of the men who killed them to be readily accepted within the court constructed narratives of their cases (Christie, 1986).

Such presentations were less evident in press reporting on the cases where, in general, there was very minimalistic coverage which presented simple facts, such as the names and ages of the victims and the occupation etc of the perpetrator. The narratives constructed around the cases were not considered to fulfil the values that gave stories a high degree of newsworthiness, although the presence of violence, which Hall et al. (1978: 68) consider has a "special status" as news value, meant they were generally reported. The time period seems to have little effect on newspaper coverage The Wheddon case in 1974, for example, was the least covered, with just two very brief reports identified, both published prior to the time at which Marion's husband has identified as the suspect.[8] By far the most covered, however, was the earliest, with at least 74 reports of the Windle case appearing in British newspapers in 1952.

Not only was this case covered more extensively and in greater detail, it was also the only case in which the press conveyed the same victim blaming narratives evident in the court files. In an extensive report, for example, indicative of many that appeared, the *Liverpool Echo* (1952) ran headlines emphasising that Francis was a "quiet" and "decent" man, while his wife was described as "domineering" and "nagging" at him. This article makes clear that even the prosecution presented Florence in this light, a powerful sign of the lack of

[8] A search for the names of all perpetrators was conducted in the British Newspaper Archive for the year in which the offence was committed. This revealed the following levels of coverage: Francis Windle (74), John Mulroy (7), Maurice Cox (5), Claude Dixon (9), Frank Wheddon (2) and William Bromley (4).

challenge produced to this narrative of the case. The lack of challenge from prosecuting agencies to the narratives constructed centred on male mental illness is also evident in other cases. Prosecuting counsel said of William Bromley that he was 'going through a period of grave problems' (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 1974). Whilst the press made almost no mention of Brenda at all, including her unhappiness or her complaints, they absolve William of culpability by focusing on the influence of political events, stating "Labour victories made doctor kill" (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 1974).

This chapter has looked in depth at representations of the women across the six cases. By looking at both their physical and their behavioural representations, it creates a full image, providing the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how they were perceived by others. The physical appearance of the women across these cases are all similar in that they are described in an asexual and frumpy way. Specifically, the symbolic nature of their nightwear functions as a visual representation of a struggling and unhappy housewife, such as that portrayed in the *Woman in a Dressing Gown* film from the 1950s. This somewhat suggestive 'scruffy physical appearance' of the women in their nightclothes alongside their seemingly fragile, emotive nature presents them as unhappy women who conform to the idea of the 'housewife syndrome', as outlined by Betty Freidan (1963) almost perfectly. There is some conformity to the Madonna side of the Madonna/whore dichotomy, but this does not work well in application to this case. The women are housewives, but their performance of this role is imperfect, meaning they are constructed in ways which show them falling short of being ideal women of ideal victims.

The overwhelming suggestion when looking at the women and their lives prior to their deaths is that there was a general dissatisfaction and resentment with their lives and the responsibilities they had in their roles as full-time housewives. This pattern in which the women are represented is evident across three decades spanning from the 1950s-1970s, despite the societal developments and shifts across this period. A key finding identified from my data is the struggle that these women faced for acceptance in society in their roles as women. The everyday challenges of raising a family and being a good partner were exacerbated with consistent representations from others that they were failing to achieve the feminine ideal imposed societally. This resonates in factors discussed throughout this chapter, particularly when commenting on how them displaying emotions was often seen as 'too emotional' as well as Brenda Bromley was 'too tied to the house.' This is despite displaying emotion and commitment to the household being portrayed historically as sought-after traits that the 'ideal woman' possessed. This concept has presented itself throughout this data and suggests that women were constricted to these significantly unrealistic ideals enforced and supported by society. but instead by their attachment to their husbands and their role as a housewife.

As referenced earlier in the thesis, one aspect of this research which makes this thesis a unique contribution is the combined focus on both cases of spousal homicide alongside cases of familicide. With this in mind, the next chapter will explore the ways in which child victims within the three cases of familicide were represented, including looking at their families' dynamics.

Chapter 5 – Data Analysis – Representations of Children and Familial Relationships

This second data chapter explores the ways in which families were represented across the six cases focused on in my research. This includes discussion of the presentation of the eight children who were victims of familicide in the Bromley, Mulroy and Dixon cases, as well as consideration of how the five children who survived in the Wheddon and Cox cases, where their father murdered their mother, were presented. Looking at the representations of children across these cases, alongside those of the six female victims discussed in the previous chapter, will contribute to understanding how the six families were represented as a family unit, as well as how they were interpreted as individuals. There will be an exploration into the recurring idea that these families were deemed as 'normal' and 'happy' families, which contributed to a narrative across the majority of these cases that these were tragic events which were completely out of the blue and unexpected. This 'perfect family' narrative is supported by presentations of the male perpetrators, who were often seen as the ideal family man whose behaviour was completely out of character for them, in contrast to their wives who were imperfect housewives. Together this operated to present their fatally violent behaviour as totally unexpected. Consequently, while representations of male perpetrators is not the main focus of my research, considerations of the men as both husbands and father figures is included because it impacted representations of the family generally.

A second important point to clarify relates to the children who survived. Throughout this chapter I will not directly refer to the children who survived in the Wheddon and Cox cases

as victims, to acknowledge the fact they were not directly attacked by their father and no physical harm came to them. Despite this, however, I recognise they should be equally seen as victims of these situations, since they effectively lost both parents in tragic and harrowing circumstances. Looking at all of these factors across the six cases will provide a comprehensive insight into these families and how those who knew them understood their relationships, which is ultimately reflected in the ways they are represented across the files.

5.1 Children as 'Flat Characters'

Something which was immediately apparent when analysing the archive files for the familicide cases was the lack of representations of child victims. This does not necessarily manifest itself through the number of times references are made, as in some cases there are many. What is evident, however, is that references to them are short and not specific to them as individuals. The children in familicide cases, for example, are often differentiated in relation solely to their physical size or their ages. An example of this, which is evident across all three of the familicide cases, is that the children are referred to as "little boy" or "elder boy" (J 206/84, Detective Chief Inspector Watson's Statement, 4th March 1974). The three Mulroy children also are described as "small boy"… "young girl"… "the other boy" (ASSI 45/244, Detective Inspector Wilkinson's Statement, 24th May 1955). Similarly, the children in the Dixon case are identified as "a girl"… "a second girl"… "little boy"… "the baby" (ASSI 36/572, Elsie Dixon Statement, 12th June 1967). As well as identifying the children by their age and size, the siblings across the cases are often grouped together and just referred to collectively, for example in the Mulroy case as "the children" or "the

three children" (ASSI 45/244, John Havis' Statement, 29th April 1955). This is also present in the Bromley file, with people referring to them throughout as "their two children" (J 206/84, Mary Walker's Statement, 1st March 1974). In the Dixon case, this is seen when Hazel and Shirley Dixon are referred to as "the two girls"… "the girls"… "the two little girls" (ASSI 36/572, Reginald Dixon's Statement, 12th June 1967). What is apparent is that siblings of the same gender were thought of collectively as "the girls" or "the boys" across the cases of familicide in this research, rather than being identified as individuals. Grouping siblings together when referring to them in this way strips away their individual identities. Instead of being remembered and recognised as separate individuals, they are considered as a collective being.

The lack of individual focus on these victims meant it was particularly challenging to accurately gain an understanding of how they are represented, as there is a lack of any meaningful details to provide context to their personalities. I argue, therefore, that the child victims in familicide cases are presented within the narratives of these cases as "flat characters" (Forster, 1927; 46). Forster uses this phrase to describe how a character within literature is developed by an author. He suggests that a flat character is "constructed around a single idea or quality" and that they can be "expressed in one sentence" (Forster, 1927; 47). This reflects the ways in which the children are represented in these cases, since their descriptions tend to be no more than a few words long, presenting basic and minimalist information without providing any context about them or their personalities. They exist within the narratives of the case files only as children, defined by their physical size or their ages, with no sense of depth, character or individuality. Within these case files, then,

particularly when compared to the female victims, they are very much ‘flat characters’. What is apparent from the lack of focus on the children is that there is no indication of blame for their deaths. There is also no indication or suggestion that the children were ill-behaved or naughty, difficult children.

Not only are the children minimised within the case file narratives, so is the violence against them. Press reports on the Mulroy and Dixon cases, for example, report the husbands being charged only with the murder of their wives and not the deaths of their children (*Shields Daily News*, 1955, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1967). In contrast William Bromley is reported as charged with all three deaths (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 1974). This lack of detail is not only evident among police and medical professionals, who would lack personal knowledge of the children, but more importantly also those who were close to the families and knew the children well, meaning these children were essentially ‘forgotten victims’. This effect has also been noticed in research on child victims of domestic violence in contemporary cases. Children who are victims to domestic violence, and sometimes even homicide, have been referred to as “hidden victims in that their individual needs are frequently ignored” (Reif and Jaffe, 2019; 2). In these cases, the children are forgotten in comparison to the ways in which their mothers, who were also victims, were represented. The main focus within the files in this research tended to be the perpetrators, with in-depth descriptions and representations of their physical appearance, behaviour, life histories and mental health. What is clear is that this attention to detail was not given to the children and they are effectively ‘hidden’ from view amongst other details of the case which are seemingly more important.

There is only one case out of the six looked at in this research in which the husband killed their wife, but not children who were also present. In the Wheddon case, Marion and Frank had four young children under the age of ten who were upstairs in bed asleep at the time of the murder. In the archive files, none of the four children are ever mentioned by name, although they are referred to a number of times as "the children", "the four children" and "the four kiddies" (J 206/93, Christian Cowell's Statement, 4th September 1974), in a similar way to the children in other cases who died. In two other cases there were adult children who were not present at the time of the murder. The first of these is the Cox case. Maurice and Daisy had one daughter together who was an adult at the time of her mother's death and living away from the family home. There is no information about her within the files other than the statement that "there is one daughter of this marriage" (ASSI 36/570, Prison Report, no date). The other surviving child is William Bromley's daughter Janet Sturges, a daughter born during his first marriage who lived with her mother when the offences took place. Looking at the representations of these children who survived, it is evident that, generally across the cases, children are under-represented, whether they were victims or whether they survived. The lack of personal references to their physical appearance as well as any behavioural traits is seen across all five cases in very similar ways. This absence of references to the children generally, whether they were victims of the domestic homicide or not reflects the previous discussion in this chapter, supporting that these children are 'flat characters' within the narratives of the cases.

As well as looking at the absence of the child victims within the case files, there was also an exploration of portrayals of the cases in the media. What was immediately apparent

when searching the British Newspaper Archive for each of the cases is that reporting of fatal domestic violence as a whole is very minimal, as I discussed in the previous chapter. Where there are references made to the cases, they are presented within the newspaper in a small column, commonly in the middle of a page. There were no front-page stories which focused on the cases, instead being placed on pages with numerous other stories and adverts. In the cases of familicide, reporting of the children was particularly minimal and the attention was instead focused on the female adult victim. This is shown in the Dixon case where it stated he was "charged with murdering his wife, Jean May Anne Dixon' (*Birmingham Daily Post,* 1967). There is no reference in reports to any other victims until three lines from the bottom where it states, "and the bodies of their children" (*Birmingham Daily Post,* 1967). There is no indication from the headline – 'Farm Worker Charged with Wife's Murder' – that children were also victims. This pattern is also seen in the Mulroy case, where the small news report highlights, he is "charged with the murder of his wife Evelyn Gertrude Mulroy" (*Bradford Observer,* 1955). Again, it is not until the bottom few lines in the column that there is reference to other victims, where it states, "and their three children – Linda Margaret (5), David John (4), and Peter (2) – were found dead in their bedroom" (*Bradford Observer,* 1955). In these cases of familicide, there appears to be a distaste in the media about the murder of the children. Literature exploring 'newsworthiness' suggests that "common or 'normal' murders … are not seen as newsworthy by journalists or their editors" (Lundman, 2003; 360). The 'domestic' nature of the cases in this research could indicate society's understanding of them as everyday crimes which happened behind closed doors, therefore, not considered as "newsworthy" as other types of murder (Lundman, 2003; 359). While children are generally recognised as

possessing many of the qualities associated with ‘ideal victims’ (Christie, 1986), which should make them more newsworthy, research has highlighted that this is the case only for certain children, with gender, class and race all affecting this (Greer, 2007, Min and Feaster, 2010). The kind of crime and the relationships involved are also relevant factors though, with victims of familial abuse remaining virtually absent from media representations in contemporary society (Kitzinger, 1999). The absence of these children, who appear only as flat characters within the archive files, is also reflected in media reporting of the cases, then, and has continued since the 1970s.

5.2 The Father Figure

Despite the seemingly minimal public responses to these cases of familicide, in the depositions, as well as in media portrayals, there is a notion that these tragic events were very much out of the blue and unexpected. This is shown particularly through portrayals of the male perpetrators. Despite the aims of this research focusing predominately on representations of female and child victims, I found that presentations of the men played a significant role in the way the family as a whole was considered. With this in mind, I will now briefly explore representations of the men, but only in terms of the role they played within their families as husbands and as fathers. This ensures a more comprehensive understanding of how each family was represented, without taking the main focus away from victims within these cases.

Men in these cases were often described as good and hardworking fathers and husbands and, most importantly, their violent actions were seen as completely out of the ordinary.

These findings support the work of Dobash et al. (2009; 194), who suggest that "when a man who appears to have no known history of violence, or any other form of criminality kills his intimate partner, popular notions and media representations often suggest that the murder seems to come 'out of the blue'". They suggest that men who murdered their intimate partners are seen as "conventional", in that they are in employment, have no prior offending history, get on well in the community and are a "good family man" (Dobash et al. 2009; 194). In this sense, most of the men in these cases were seen as conventional. Apart from Frank Wheddon, the other five men were all in continuous employment and were generally well respected within their community. This is particularly the case for William Bromley, who worked as a General Practitioner in Gillingham and was described as a "very good Doctor" and an "intelligent man" (J 206/84, Patricia Hemmel's Statement, 2nd March 1974). In the mid-twentieth century, social understandings of doctors suggest they were "among the most powerful and highly trusted professionals" (Brown et al. 2015). The Bromley's were the most middle class of all the families, and this may have influenced some of the neighbours' judgements of Brenda as a housewife.

As well as breadwinners and good husbands, the men were also portrayed within the family as loving and caring fathers. Representations of these men were largely positive then, conforming to an ideal of a family man who was supporting and providing for their families financially and emotionally. In some instances, the men are referred to as showing a strong emotional attachment to their families, speaking to others about their love for their wife and children. William Bromley, for example, was said to have "often spoke about his wife and family, his two sons … he idolized them … there was nobody else in the world but

them" (J 206/84, John Tidman's Statement, 3rd March 1974). He was also seen as a good family man whose "relationship with this wife was a happy one" and who "loved both of his children" (DPP 2/5400, Azizul Hasan's Statement, 1st March 1974). Such emotive language is also seen in the Mulroy case, when he himself describes his family with references to his children as "my darlings" (ASSI 45/244, Letter addressed to the Family Doctor written by John Mulroy, no date). He often uses the same nickname to speak about his wife Evelyn Mulroy, calling her "darling" (ASSI 45/244, Letter addressed to the Police written by John Mulroy, no date). There is also reference to John Mulroy being involved with dropping their daughter Linda off at school and being particularly involved in the children's care (*Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 1955). Press reports, too, describe John as a "devoted family man" (*Yorkshire Post*, 1955). These two fathers are the ones who are spoken about in the most emotive way, being portrayed across the files significantly as a 'good father figure' to their children and their families. Such representations, then, appear most prominently in familicide cases, although Maurice Cox is described as being "devoted" to his wife and she to him (J 82/824, Appeal Trial Transcript, 20th March 1967).

In the post-war period, Seal (2010; 142) states that the role of a man within a domestic context would "provided financially for their families and also spent their leisure time with them, fulfilling the mid-twentieth century ideal of the 'companionate marriage' in which the woman and man would be equal partners with different roles to perform". This concept of 'companionate marriage' is highlighted by Collins (2003; 93) as an equal partnership which "represented the basis for mutual respect and mutual affection". Reflecting on the details of the cases provided in Chapter 3, as well as the findings discussed in Chapters 4

and 5, I consider that from the representations of the relationships between each of the six couples were not understood as companionate marriages. As for the roles expected to be fulfilled by both genders within a companionate marriage, the men in most of the cases were represented as breadwinners within their families as they were working and providing for their families. On the other hand, the findings presented in the previous chapter suggest that the women did not fit their part of the deal and perform their expected roles adequately.

5.3 The Normal 'Happy' Family

As well as seemingly 'normal' men, the families generally are also portrayed as a the 'perfect family'. There is an identifiable pattern throughout the cases that the fatally violent event happened out of the blue, constituting a surprise which was very much not expected. Many of the depositions reference the relationships between family members, commenting in general on how they appeared to get on, rather than referencing examples or specific events. This is evident across the majority of the cases when the individual states that the family "seemed" to be normal or happy, or whatever the phrase they were using to describe the family's relationship. The word "seemed" is interesting. It could suggest that the individual commenting on the family did not know them in depth or were not fully aware of how their relationships were unfolding behind closed doors. Perhaps creating a sense of an isolated family lacking intimacy or closeness with others. Alternatively, it could reflect the degree to which previously held perceptions had been affected by events, raising questions about whether these families were potentially experiencing significant problems leading up to their deaths, and yet appeared to others, or those who knew them, as if they were happy. Unlike comments about the women discussed in the previous chapter, there is

less sense of judgement about the families and their relationships, making it harder to determine the exact nature of representations like this.

There are many examples of this across the six cases, with phrases such as “they seemed happy” and “they seemed a very happy family” frequently repeated (ASSI 45/244, Martha Dinning’s Statement, 29th April 1955 and J 206/93, Police Constable Winter’s Statement, 4th September 1974). A similar pattern is identified within a thesis which looked at the case of the death of Mary Tebbenham, who was shot in the head at close range by her husband William Tebbenham in 1845 (Startup, 2000). Neighbours highlighted to the police that the couple had “always seemed happy and comfortable together”, suggesting an exceptional and abnormal event within an otherwise harmonious relationship (Startup, 2000; 127).

Other descriptions focus particularly on the relationship between the husband and wife and largely suggest that they seemed happy. The Mulroy’s were described as “a happily married couple” (J 206/93, Police Constable Winter’s Statement, 4th September 1974). Other comments relating to the marriages rely on assessments of normality, such as the Bromley’s relationship being referred to as “fairly normal” and “perfectly normal” (DPP 2/5400, Report of the Trial, 26th April 1974). Descriptions of the marriages as ‘normal’ does not provide an insight into specific details of the relationship and is considerably open to interpretation of the individual as to what they perceive a ‘normal’ relationship to be. They also contrast somewhat with presentations of many of the women as unhappy or complaining, implying that the abnormality of the family or the marriage is not the cause of this. Despite this, the phrase is used multiple times across the depositions by numerous

people referencing the marriages. The result of this however means that these types of descriptions, although frequently present across the files, they do not provide an in-depth insight into the relationships within these families as well as relationships that they had with other people who knew them personally.

Variations of these types of descriptions are repeated throughout, even in the Wheddon case where Frank's jealousy was recognised as causing some problems, as I will discuss shortly. The clear exception is the Windles. Their relationship is consistently described as turbulent, troubled and unhappy in each of the depositions referencing their marriage, as well as in Francis Windle's direct comments on his marital situation. Francis frequently speaks of his wife, Florence, in a negative way, and others observed he "continually complained" about her (ASSI 13/270, Harry Hunt's Statement, 27th February 1952). There is no attempt to disguise his negative thoughts. In one statement, for example, he declares she has been "making my life a misery" (ASSI 13/270, Detective Inspector Bithery's Statement, 27th February 1952). The couple's landlord stated the couple "constantly argued" and that, immediately prior to Florence's murder, had "seemed to be arguing more than usual" (ASSI 13/270, Elsie Clark's Statement, 27th February 1952). Interestingly Francis is the only man to be convicted of murder, meaning his defence of communicated insanity was not accepted by the jury. Consequently, there seems to be some scepticism about the narrative created around the case, despite the fact that even the prosecution portrayed the marriage as turbulent and Florence as domineering.

To a lesser degree than with the Windle's, there are also references to problems within Frank and Marion Wheddon's marriage, which is described as a "situation which was very strained" (J 206/93, Psychiatrist's Report, 9th September 1974). These marital problems are presented as stemming from Frank Wheddon's "morbid jealousy" of Marion, which was the grounds for his defence to Marion's murder (J 206/93, Psychiatrist's Report, 9th September 1974). Frank Wheddon was convinced that Marion was unfaithful to him whilst they were married and "hated her to even look at other men", accusing her "for no good reason of being a prostitute and a whore" (J 206/93, Lynda Maltby's Statement, 4th September 1974). According to information located within the archives, as well as media portrayals of the case, this is the only couple in which domestic incidents had been previously reported to the police prior to the final fatal form of domestic violence. A Police Constable described one of these occurrences as a "domestic upset" (J 206/93, Police Constable Winter's Statement, 4th September 1974), a phrase which significantly minimises the aggression and violence involved on the occasion. Other than these two cases, there are no representations of pre-existing trouble within the marriages of the other four couples.

These representations of the families as normal and the violent events that ended the lives of wives and children as unexpected and unpredictable provide a contrast to the ways in which the women are represented. Their presentation as failing to conform to ideal notions of womanhood and their perceived unhappiness in their gendered roles does not seem to affect representations of the wider family as 'normal'. Representations of the family, then, combine with those of the women to convey an even greater sense that the women are in

part to blame for the violence inflicted on them, and in some cases their children. Their unhappiness, and the mental ill health of their husbands, is not usually explained within these narratives as resulting from problems or troubles within the family or familial relations. Rather the women fail to be happy themselves within an otherwise 'normal' and 'happy' family, with the result that their husbands become mentally unwell and consequently fatally violent. The Windle and Wheddon cases stand out from this to some degree, because they do not rely on such a strong construction of family relations as 'normal'. Interestingly, though, these are also the cases in which the harshest punishments are given, with Windle initially sentenced to death and Wheddon given a life sentence rather than a hospital order. Possibly, then, the construction of a narrative based around inexplicable violence within a normal family in which the wife was not deviant but failed to meet the ideal standards of wives and women was the most successful for enabling a mental based defence to domestic homicide in this period.

This chapter has explored the ways in which the children were represented as victims across cases of familicide, as well as surviving children from cases of spouse murder. Across this chapter the representations of the children who died as well as those who survived were compared to representations of how their mothers were represented. What was evident is that the children were significantly under-represented across the statements and reports within the files in relation to the representation of their mothers. Consistently throughout, the noticeable lack of attention to personal details about them and the lack of attempt to differentiate between the victims made it problematic to gain a detailed understanding of how child victims in cases of children are forgotten in relation to the

female victims within these cases. Distinctions between the children were predominantly numeric, relating to their physical size as well as their age in comparison to their siblings. An interesting exception to the non-emotive references of the children is when they are referenced by their fathers across documents from the archives. The language used to describe them is emotive, often referring to them by a nickname. In relation to the minimal representations of the children, opinions and expression of feelings towards family structures within depositions and reports within the archive files were in abundance. It is apparent that all of the families were 'normal' and 'seemed happy', with the exception of the Windles. It could be suggested that there was an attempt from the families across all three periods to portray a 'happy and ideal family image' to others no matter what problems they may be experiencing themselves behind closed doors. At the head of these 'happy', nuclear families was the father figure, who were largely represented as a conventional family man who was a good husband and father to their children. This is rarely disputed and representations of the men in their familial roles are consistent throughout. The language used within depositions which reference these familial relationships appear to be non-personal and suggest that these individuals did not know the families on a deep and personal level to be able to confidently describe their relationships. Many of the comments appear vague and non-specific, portraying a sense that the families were closed off and kept their personal lives predominantly private. This lack of personal representations of the families however does limit the extent to which it is attainable to fully understand the relationships and family dynamics are represented across these cases.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

This thesis presents an original analysis of representations of victims in cases of domestic homicide in the mid-twentieth century committed by a male perpetrator. The research focused on such representations in six cases of domestic homicide which occurred between 1955-1974, which included three cases of spousal homicide only and three cases of familicide. This selection presented the chance of exploring differences between representations of victims in different types of domestic homicide, which is something that was identified as a significant gap in knowledge within the literature review. The period is also one which has been relatively unexplored in relation to this topic, and yet significant social and political developments may have affected gendered representations. Looking in depth at the six cases has allowed a close examination of representations related to usually private and unseen incidents. The nature of domestic homicide is that it typically happens behind closed doors, and the files from The National Archives provide researchers the opportunity to look back in time to provide insights and understandings which inform our knowledge of social and cultural perceptions of historical periods.

The thesis first highlighted existing key areas of research which have influenced this study. Key examples which inspired this research include a study conducted by Butler (2018) which looks extensively at representations of the male perpetrator in cases of paternal child murder in the 1900s and the cultural approach taken by Neale (2020) in her study of domestic murder in the twentieth century using court files and crime science photographs. Gaps which remain following these publications though are a key concern for this study,

particularly representations in the mid-twentieth century and the inclusion of child victims as well as adult females.

The ways in which narratives were constructed around these cases, and consequently the positioning of victims within them, was potentially impacted significantly not only by social and political changes, but also by legal shifts such as the *Homicide Act* (1957) and the *Mental Health Act* (1959). In all cases the perpetrators relied on defences associated with insanity, or later diminished responsibility following its introduction as a partial defence. The thesis also considers how this altered how domestic homicide was understood at the time, although the focus on victims has meant that the mental health of the perpetrator is not the dominant concern. For these reasons, the six cases selected provide a valuable insight into key developments in the three decades considered, areas which are yet to be explored in depth.

As explained in Chapter 2, my research has explicitly taken a victim-centred approach to counter the tendency, evident within the case files, but also more broadly across society, for female and child victims to be forgotten, or not accorded a central role, in research focused on representations of domestic homicide. Some mention is inevitably made of perpetrators, such as in Chapter 3 where I discuss key facts about each of the cases and the narratives presented in court. Whilst I wanted this research to take a victim-focused approach, it was necessary to provide details of the circumstances to contextualise the positions of the families prior to the murders and to include an account of the violence inflicted on the victims, which is often minimised elsewhere, as this thesis shows. This

provided a chance for the reader to understand the lives of these six families, allowing their stories to be told in ways which did not repeat the construction presented in court. Many of these details included in the synopses include references to the mental health of the male perpetrators at the time of the offence. Including these references to their mental health and their pleas at trial provide the reader with an understanding of how these offences were perceived at different stages across the mid-twentieth century. There is also reference to the perpetrators in Chapter 5 but what is important here is exploring how their roles within the family and as fathers is presented, and the focus is not them as perpetrators. It was decided that inclusion of these representations was invaluable for understanding the wider impact of representations surrounding the relationships and social structures of each of the families, and for presenting the arguments developed here.

The main analysis was divided into two chapters. The first explored the representations of female adult victims in the six cases. Key findings indicate that, overall, the six women were represented as not conforming to the ideals of femininity prevalent at the time, mainly through their relationship to their role as housewives, but also in relation to other aspects such as physical appearance and sexuality. The most predominant finding in relation to the women was that they all were all represented as displaying symptoms of what Adams (2020) described as the "housewife syndrome". This was evident through unhappiness or neurotic behaviours, but there was also an element of the longstanding cultural trope of the "shrew" or nagging wife in some cases. This inadequacy of failure as housewives is given a physical manifestation through a focus on the women wearing dressing gowns or nightwear, a symbolism which was also evident in popular culture at the time, for example,

through the film ‘The Woman in a Dressing Gown’, whose lead character, the wearer of this item, is presented as inadequately performing her feminine role both in relation to domestic tasks and standards of beauty.

Generally, however, there was a distinct lack of physical representations of the women and so little corporal objectification of them. Despite the importance of physical appearance to constructions of feminine identity, as highlighted by Ritchie (2010), the physical appearance of the women in the cases was barely represented throughout the files. This partly reflects the way the women were not seen as not having their own identities, and this was especially true in media reports after it was known that the perpetrator was their husband. As well as their physical appearance, the lack of references to the women’s bodies indicates these women were not presented in a sexualised way. Instead, they were actively represented as asexual. There was a slight exception to this in the case of Marion Wheddon which could be the result of changing social attitudes to women and sex by the 1970s, although it could also be due to Marion’s age (she was youngest of the adult victims) and her husband’s defence, which relied on morbid jealousy.

Representations of the women, then, were often negative, although they did not quite fit into classic categorisations often discussed in research on representations of women, such as the Madonna, the whore or the shrew. The focus on their role as housewives and their asexual presentation has similarities with the notion of the Madonna, but the conjunction of this with characterisations indicating elements of “housewife syndrome” limits the appropriateness of that term. Similarly, while there are shrew-like elements to their

representation, especially in some cases, they do not fully conform to that category either. Gilbert and Gubar's (1979) classic work on female representations in literature suggests that such dichotomies are often related to a separation of good and bad, or the "angel" and the "monster". In these cases, however, the women are represented as neither extreme, although there is a strong sense that their femininity is inadequate in various ways, limiting the degree to which they are recognised as ideal victims. In the narratives constructed around the cases this inadequacy is subtly presented as influencing the mental health of their husbands, making the violence against them justified, or at least mitigating the responsibility of the men for this, as evident in their successful avoidance of the most severe punishments. This was less evident in the Windle and Wheddon cases, but even in these Francis was reprieved and Frank's plea of diminished responsibility was accepted by the jury.

The second data analysis chapter moves on to consider representations of children and of the family unit. Just as the female victims were frequently stripped of their own identities, rarely referred to by their names, and usually presented through their relation to their husbands, predominantly as "his wife", so too the child victims were often absent or minimal in the case files. Indeed, they were represented even more non-personally than their mothers, commonly referred to throughout only in terms of their gender, age or physical size. Differentiation between siblings was minimal and the children were rarely referenced by name at all. I argue that this is indicative of the children being represented as 'flat characters' (Forster, 1974), present on paper but seen only through the lens of their status as children, without any sense of their quirks and personalities, or of them as live

people. There is an element too of the women as ‘flat characters’, but this is more extreme with the child victims who are stripped down to just one characteristic, being seen only as small and young. This reflects a broader sense, evident in contemporary accounts of domestic violence as well, for victims, and especially child victims, to become “forgotten” or “hidden”. This is not necessarily reflected in the number of times they are referenced throughout the files, but in the lack of attention to portraying their individuality. These finding justify the victim-centred approach of the research, which was developed partly in response to that the tendency within existing research to focus on perpetrators rather than victims in cases of domestic homicide.

Chapter 5 also included discussion focused on how the families were represented. This provides a sharp contrast with representations of the women as unhappy, inadequate or nagging, since the relationships of the family unit as presented as unproblematic and seemingly harmonious. Often, however, perceptions of family dynamics within depositions and statements to the police appeared speculative, with frequent use of the words “seemed” or “appeared”. Interpreting this is difficult, and it may reflect a lack of close knowledge of the families, or a sense that the fatal violence which had occurred had shaken pre-existing perceptions. Despite this, representations of the families were frequently referenced across the files and the phrases “normal” and “happy” recur frequently to describe different families. Little explanation is given of the sense in which the families were considered normal, and there is no exploration of the apparent contradiction between the representation of the families as happy, while the women are often presented as unhappy or dissatisfied.

The main exceptions to this general finding were the relationships between Francis and Florence Windle and Frank and Marion Wheddon. Their marriages are described as unhappy and turbulent throughout, with individuals commenting specifically on with the frequency of arguments between them. Even in these cases, though, there is a sense of shock or surprise at what has happened, and with the Wheddon's also the occasion description of them as "happy family" even though the marriage was tense at times. Interestingly, these two cases are the ones in which the sentences given are the most severe, an indication that the narrative of defence due to mental illness was less convincing when there were suggestions that the families were not "happy" and "normal". What is interesting to note here is that despite The Wheddon's marriage being problematic throughout, when they are described as a family including their children it is positive, with references to them as a "happy family". What this suggests is that despite their troublesome and seemingly unhappy marriage, their familial relationship appeared to others who knew them to be strong, representing what was deemed to be a "normal" family. The discussion focused on the notion that these events happened very much out of the blue and the general view from the statements from people who knew them appeared to be shocked by the events which had taken place.

Quite central within representation of the families as "normal" was the role the 'ideal' father figure within the families' dynamics. Especially in the cases of familicide the perpetrators were portrayed as good and regular fathers who loved and cared for their children. These findings were supported by research conducted by Butler (2018) who identified that men who killed their children were viewed sympathetically by others and

that they were generally perceived as loving and caring fathers. This significantly contrasts with the representations of the female victims as wives, where the dominant element of portrayals is that they did not conform to the ideals expected of them in some way. Within the overall narratives of the case files, which were often broadly accepted by both prosecution and defence, this contradiction operated to support ideas that mitigated male responsibility for their fatal violence. In part it denied the women any explanation for their unhappiness and dissatisfaction, since they had good husbands and normal, happy families. Their inadequacies, therefore, were the element within the family unit that detracted from an otherwise normal set of relationships, and so the narratives subtly imply this contributed to the violence that occurred.

These findings offer original contributions to knowledge which demonstrate how constructions of women operated to mitigate responsibility for male violence in relation to a period and type of domestic homicide case that had been little studied. It confirms but expands upon a significant body of work that has found similar evidence in different periods and in relation to other types of violence by men against women (Dolan, 1994; Elsmley, 2008; Walsh, 2016; Butler, 2018). It also highlights, however, problems with dichotomised understandings of representations of women in relation to these cases. The women studied here were portrayed neither as ‘angels’ nor ‘monsters’ but their inadequacies or imperfections were important to their representations and drew from elements within common categorisations of women whilst not entirely conforming to any of them. The absence of extremes within the representations may be related to the fact that these cases involved not a total abdication of male responsibility for violence but a partial

one. Consequently, further research on the role of diminished responsibility or insanity as a defence in such cases, rather than defences such as provocation which have been more widely studied, may be useful. The most consistent concept within representations of these women was that of "housewife syndrome", suggesting that this may have value more broadly for understanding representations of female victims in cases of domestic homicide.

Child victims of domestic homicide have been much less studied, making the contributions in this area particularly important. The concept of 'flat characters' has been offered as a way of understanding the presence and yet absence of children in the narratives created around these cases of domestic homicide, and this may have broader relevance for understanding how (some) children are seen (or not seen) as victims in different historical periods. Generally, though, there is a need for more research on representations of children as victims of a range of offences, and work by Hay (2021) represents an important contribution to this. Such approaches are necessary to understand, but also to counter, the way in which children often become forgotten in research on crime and victimisation.

As for the future prospects for research in this field, files relating to the cases which remain closed may have the potential to offer alternative representations, or to reveal or support perspectives identified throughout this thesis. A number of files are not due to become open at The National Archives for a number of years yet. As cultural analysis acknowledges the nature of 'truth' is elusive and the findings presented here are clearly one particular interpretation of the data considered. The limitations of archival research highlighted in Chapter 3 should be born in mind but broadly this study contributes to other similar studies,

such as those by Seale (2010; 2014) and Neale (2020) by highlighting the utility of such an approach within historical criminology. Approaching depositions and statements used in court cases as 'enforced narratives' and reading them on different levels, as advocated by Neale (2020) acts as guard against such limitations and enables cultural narratives outside of the media to be accessible.

Further research exploring more cases across the period may help to confirm or contradict the suggestion that there was little change over the period, despite the influence of significant social developments such as second wave feminism. There is a slight suggestion in the cases from the 1970s of changing interpretations of women's roles as housewives, although this is only really evident in one case and requires further investigation. Undoubtedly research into domestic homicide across the mid twentieth century and beyond will expand as a result of the availability of more archival materials. My work offers concepts and interpretations which may be useful to the development of analysis in such research.

Finally, this thesis has emphasised and highlighted the value of victim-focused research in cases of male perpetrated domestic homicide across the mid-twentieth century. I support arguments by authors such as Seal (2012) that ethical consideration is required by researchers when remembering historical victims of crime, and especially when this relates to victims who have been marginalised in archival materials and public perceptions more generally. Further work needs to be done in this field, putting victims at the centre of focus, and there should also be more debate and consideration of the most ethical ways to relate

to and write about historical victims. With this is mind I would like to end with a personal reference to the victims in these cases. First the victims of their husband's violence: Florence, Daisy, Marion, Evelyn, Jean and Brenda, who were I'm sure strong and powerful women who deserve to be remembered for who they were and not by their husband's surname. And finally, the children who lost their lives at the hands of their fathers: Linda, David, Peter; Shirley, Hazel, and David; and Ian and Richard. Their lives were cut short by violence, but they were certainly not the flat characters they were presented as being and it is as lively, living children we should remember them.

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