

11 “What Else Can I Add?”: Inverting the Narrative through Female Perspectives in *Falling for A Killer, My Favorite Murder,* and *Murder, Mystery & Make Up*

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His name, his actions, and his trial and execution are synonymous with popular true crime. His story has been told and retold, imbuing him with almost superhuman qualities. In asking “what else can I add?” Bailey Sarian succinctly sums up at the start of her retelling of the much-requested Ted Bundy case that there is seemingly nothing more to contribute to the myriad accounts of Bundy. Around 2019, there was a surge of interest in the case, driven in part by two texts from Joe Berlinger: a four-part documentary on Netflix, *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, and a film starring Zack Efron as Bundy, in *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Vile and Evil*, both released in January 2019, marking 30 years since Bundy was executed at Florida State Prison in January 1989. Aside from these two offerings from Berlinger, the Bundy story has been told over and over again, by men.¹ Troublingly, in these previous Bundy texts, he is presented as handsome and clever, heroic and iconic. As Jean Murley notes, Bundy as a “primal socio-psychopathic American icon [has been] granted the kind of cultural capital usually given to celebrities” (Murley 2008). In *Conversations with a Killer*, Bundy is suggested as an awe-inspiring character, so smart he was able to outwit the police and detectives time and time again. By holding Bundy up in this way, those tasked to find him and those who failed to keep hold of him (Bundy escaped twice) maintain their authoritative and folk hero status (Gaynor 2022). Berlinger’s *Extremely Wicked* takes great pains to show us how handsome Bundy was, with scene after scene depicting women swooning and smiling at Bundy (Zack Efron) as he goes about his business. In this film, Bundy is a rogue who is only finally shown to be the monster he was, when he writes the word HACKSAW in the dirty glass that separates him and Elizabeth Kendall (Lily Collins) in the final days of his life on Death Row; this is done in response to Elizabeth’s request to know what happened to the head

of a victim. Only in this tiny moment, in the closing minutes of the film, does Berlinger present the monstrous Ted, and not the handsome, plucky, lovable rogue that the previous ninety minutes have given us. All of this adoration for Bundy is given reason by David Schmid, as he notes that “the only way they [filmmakers, directors] can get around the problem of Bundy’s ordinariness is to assume the presence of the extraordinary [...] comforted by the thought that Bundy’s apparent normality is just that, an apparition, with no stability next to the reliable solidarity of the monster” (Schmid 2006). Such a persistent fascination with Bundy is, as David Foster Williams states, part of our “lengthy interactions with hideous men” (quoted in Mittell 2004), and these narratives about Bundy and other murderers “are shaped by the means of their production” (Murley 2008). In response to these presentations, this chapter explores what happens when this story is told by women, examining three very different media texts which all engage with the Bundy tale, and explores three different emotional responses to the story. Where previous tellings of Bundy are told by men and from Bundy’s perspective,² the three case studies chosen here are told by women – women who were directly involved, or telling the story from a women’s perspective. According to a report from Los Angeles Community Policing in 2010, of the 1,398 known victims of serial killers since 1985, 70% are women. In addition, “women are fuelling the genre’s [true crime] renaissance, in terms of being disproportionately the victims of crimes and the consumers of their retellings” (Levy 2020). Laura Browder notes that in a poll which asked publishers, true crime writers and bookstore owners, “two-thirds to three-quarters of the readers [...] are women” (Browder 2006). With that in mind, this chapter unpacks what happens and what is added to this well-known tale of Ted Bundy when women tell it: A live recording of the *My Favorite Murder* podcast in 2017 hosted by Karen Kilgraff and Georgia Hardstark; a five-part series on Amazon Prime directed by Trish Wood titled *Ted Bundy: Falling for a Killer* (2020) which interviews Bundy’s long-time girlfriend Elizabeth Kendall and her daughter Molly alongside a raft of women involved – survivors, victims’ families, women who knew Ted; and an episode from Bailey Sarian’s *Murder, Mystery & Make Up* series on YouTube, “1 of America’s Most Notorious, Ted Bundy” (2020). These female-led narratives present an inversion of the story, adding the female perspective, giving space to previously unheard voices, taking Bundy’s power away and giving autonomy and identity back to the women whose lives he destroyed. As a reviewer on *Letterboxd* noted about *Falling for a Killer*, “what good is a crime documentary if it is made by someone who has never held their keys like a weapon when walking home?” (Raine 2020).

My Favorite Murder

Launching in 2016, *My Favorite Murder* is a weekly podcast hosted by Karen Kilgraff and Georgia Hardstark. Each week the hosts take turns to

tell the other about a particular, or favourite murder. As one tells, the other listens and reacts, and both frequently go off on tangents about anything and everything that takes their fancy. Although a true crime podcast, *My Favorite Murder* (MFM) also sits firmly in the comedy genre, with both hosts having strong backgrounds in comedy³ and stand up. The podcast has legions of fans who call themselves “Murderinos,” and the show has given birth to many a catchphrase, including “Stay Sexy and Don’t Get Murdered,” and the fantastically useful “Fuck Politeness.” Taking their podcast out on the road for live shows, in 2017 MFM played The Neptune Theatre in Seattle, located in the University District – where Bundy attacked and abducted a number of victims. After Hardstark tells her story about Mia Zapata,⁴ Kilgraff knows she will not fail to beat that tale, as she announces “I’m doing Ted Bundy,” and the crowd in The Neptune scream and roar to this announcement of the telling of the tale of, as Kilgraff describes, their “hometown super-monster.”

In this live recording, and in all of the MFM episodes, there is very little artifice. We hear the hosts and the crowd; we hear the echo on the mic as it reverberates around the theatre. The audience are very involved, and the cheering continues from these Seattle locals as known place names and locations are read out by Killgraff during the retelling. Like the pre-recorded MFM podcast episodes, the show is imperfect, and “not overly edited, Karen and Georgia emote, stumble, divulge and get side-tracked just like any normal conversation” (*Quill Podcasting* 2020). The only difference with this recording is, at The Neptune, the hosts are in conversation with the crowd as well as each other. We hear the emotional reaction to the story details, emotions which for Seattle residents are still raw. I do not want this chapter to be yet another retelling of Bundy’s crimes, so I will leave out the detail of what he did, but as Kilgraff reads off her written list of crimes committed, this act reveals its complicity in the oft-cited troublesome ethics of true crime consumption. Being an aural telling, an imaginative “reconstruction of gruesome murders [...] forces the listener [or crowd member] to acknowledge their own complicity with the propagation of the details” (Greer 2018). This is unpacked on stage as crowd members cheer and clap during various moments of the recounting, and the MFM hosts comment “don’t cheer that,” as Woodrow Wilson High School gets a cheer, as does The University of Washington when these places are cited alongside the women who were abducted at these locations. The crowd cheers at local addresses, and then react with emotive gasps and exclamations of horror at the murder descriptions. Cheering is a reactive and positive response of loud shouting from a crowd as they show their approval, or to encourage a person who is engaged in an activity. There is cheering for Kilgraff as she announces she is doing Bundy, encouraging her to tell the tale, which is then followed by further cheering for locations of abductions. The crowd are loudly complicit in their want to hear this horrible story, but the recognition of it happening in locations that are familiar, personalises the

retelling of the Bundy story to them with the recognition and intimacy of knowing both the places and the story so well. While the cheering for the story and the locations seems problematic or in poor taste, it shifts the meaning of the mention of the victims. Instead of the murdered female body being a site that only exists to give evidence about and point to the male killer, rendered a site of only “information and knowledge” (Greer 2018), here there is an affective emotional reaction to the descriptions of the women and what was done to them. Affect theory places emphasis on the emotional effects that are instigated within the receiver, exploring the typical or in this case, the atypical responses. The cheers that the hosts comment on as being illogical – “don’t cheer that” – might be read as inappropriate affect. However, the aural affect heard on the recording is in response to revulsion and horror at Bundy’s actions, and in sympathy and empathy for victims and families. For example, affective responses of sympathy, compassion, and condolences for the family can all be detected when Melissa Smith’s name is read out as victim and daughter of the Salt Lake City Police Chief; there is a clear burst of empathy for her father, which is heard from both Hardstark and the crowd, adding an empathy for the trauma felt by those directly involved, offering a sense of communal commiseration and a collective therapy session, as hosts and audience work through the traumatic elements of the story via affective emotional response. This emotional response to the tale is also juxtaposed with tearing Bundy down through comedic mocking of his actions, words, behaviour, and failures. While “the images flicker in and out the mind” (Greer 2018), this is combined with the feelgood, giving “positive and negative affect” (Horecks 2019) in the combination of humour and horror as presented by the MFM hosts.

“Some Amazing Sweaters”

While recounting the Bundy story once again and to a very appreciative Pacific Northwest crowd might seem like an obvious crowd-pleasing tactic, a podcast either via digital download or live show, by its very nature demands high levels of listener/audience engagement. A podcast listener needs to find and choose which podcast to listen to and when to play it, or to buy a ticket and go see this podcast live. The listener, or audience member, wants to hear a true crime story be told in this particular way. MFM is as said, a true crime comedy podcast, and it is through the lens of female led comedy that Bundy is torn down and stripped of his power. Comedy has the capacity to address serious social issues, and as comedian Wanda Sykes says, can speak “up for people who don’t have a voice” (Sykes, in Willett and Willett 2019). Humour and comedy gigs are means of fun, but they are also ways to explore and get to the very “guts of an issue,” which here is the pointing to the continuing endemic violence and rage against women.

Under the cover of amusement [...] humor can serve as a source of empowerment, a strategy for outrage and truth telling, a counter to fear, a source of joy and friendship, a cathartic treatment [...] and even a means of empathetic connection and alliance.

(Willett and Willett 2019)

Kilgraff and Hardstark are relentless in their mocking of Bundy, pulling away all the extraordinary attributes that have been given to this very ordinary yet disgusting man. As Kilgraff recounts Bundy's first girlfriend, Stephanie Brooks (a pseudonym) dumping him for lacking ambition, Kilgraff does a scathing impression of Bundy telling Brooks that he appreciates her candour and honesty – a cutting remark that explicitly calls out Bundy as a snivelling loser who could not cope with being rejected. The tale continues as Bundy joins the Republican party, to much booing from the crowd, and Bundy's 1970s style is mocked with Kilgraff's searing sarcasm regarding his "amazing sweaters." The hosts mock his fake British accent, and when the re-telling arrives at the attempted abduction of Carole DaRonch, including her incredible escape after fighting back, the crowd goes wild as Kilgraff yells that DaRonch "escapes from fuckin' Ted Bundy!" Hardstark supports the roaring crowd with "Fuck yes, Carole!" In this moment, the story is told from a place of identification and incredible affection for the victim, DaRonch, rather than identifying with the killer. In an interview with *Elle* magazine, Kilgraff said "the actual storytelling has been historically male dominated [...] we usually listen to men tell us how it went" (Dibdin 2021). In this moment of joy that DaRonch escaped with such bravery and fight, the emotion from the hosts and the crowd is palpable in the aural recording of the live show. As a listener, I cannot see their faces, I cannot see their arms punching the air in support of DaRonch, but I can hear it, and I can feel the contempt for Bundy.

More Than a Chalk Outline

In adding empathy to the story, Kilgraff and Hardstark recast the victims as real people. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Kilgraff explained that these women are so much more than "chalk outline plot devices" and they deserved so much better (Fitzpatrick 2017). In recasting the victims as real people and not just sites of information for the (usually) male detectives to understand more about the (usually) male killers, Kilgraff and Hardstark are giving bodily control back to the victims, and women more generally. The women who have been murdered lost their control says Hardstark, "because some fucking guy feels like he has the authority to take her life" (Fitzpatrick 2017). This anger and incredulity towards the actions of such killers, which is then mirrored in the crowd's reactions and the millions of downloads of MFM, speak to the shifting sands in the way that these stories are told. The podcast offers opportunities for social activism through

structured interactivity between the producers and the listeners, and the relationship between the content, the consumer, and the fan communities that build up around them, communities built on a shared empathy. Murderinos have self-created a range of support groups, away from any direct input from Kilgraff and Hardstark. These groups support each other around issues of sexual abuse, domestic abuse or even financial hardship. In short, what MFM and its fans add to the story of Ted Bundy, is mutual support and understanding in spaces away from the “masculine detective gaze” (Greer 2018) and the until now prevailing male dominating voice. Earlier I mentioned catchphrases that have evolved out of MFM. “Stay Sexy and Don’t Get Murdered” closes the show and neatly “encapsulates the central premise that talking (and joking) about murder helps to ward off anxieties about violence” (Horecks 2019). I would elaborate on how Horecks reads the phrase, by exploring how the “Stay Sexy” element also projects an interesting point regarding post-feminist rhetoric around the pride in female beauty and control on how women are perceived. This is not to say that I think that MFM subscribes to any specific post-feminist framework, but I do think that there is a recognition of the idiosyncrasies of post-feminism, and the cult-like nature of the fandom around the show. There is a certain element of “being in the know” with regards to MFM and Murderino culture. From the outside, “Stay Sexy and Don’t Get Murdered” might be construed as putting the onus of survival on the woman. But for those inside the circle, in the cult fandom, these phrases become an identifying marker of audience participation which sees Murderinos taking charge of their bodies, how they think about them, and how their anxieties and even past experiences can be supported by each other. This identifying marker even more so in “Fuck Politeness,” encapsulates the deep-seated anger towards women being expected to be quiet and attentive. MFM and the Murderinos are crucial to the changing attitudes towards those that inflict violence and those that experience it. No longer do victims need to feel shame, or keep quiet. Women are speaking out and mocking those that cause trauma, and women are having their story heard in a space away from male dominated legacy media, with a comedic and cathartic emotional response which creates community, empathy, sympathy and support. These progressive and constructive additions are the drivers of this retelling of the Bundy story.

Falling for a Killer

As mentioned, 2019 saw two high-profile screen works telling the Bundy story, and both by Joe Berlinger. *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, and *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Vile and Evil*. While *Conversations* does in passing suggest Bundy was a monster, the four-part documentary for the most part expounds on Bundy the genius, Bundy the chameleon, and leaves the reputation of the authorities intact. *Extremely*

Wicked paints Bundy as an almost impossibly handsome scamp, and was supposed to be telling the story through the eyes of Elizabeth Kendall, his long-time girlfriend. It should be noted that Kendall stated in her own account of her relationship with Bundy, that “there had been no book option,” despite “her story” being told in a new Bundy movie. Kendall was stunned, she writes, “how could they tell my story without ever speaking with me?” (Kendall 2020). In her book, *The Phantom Prince: My Life with Ted Bundy*⁵ (originally published in 1981, and then updated in 2020), Kendall explains that it was time to tell the story as she and her daughter Molly experienced it, through a documentary directed by Trish Wood. Kendall states that she was interested in this project because “of its emphasis on the viewpoints of many of the women involved in this tragic story” (Kendall, 2020), and not the sensationalising of the horrific murders, or the placing of Bundy on a celebrity pedestal, or the convenient omittance of the multiple mistakes made by the authorities.⁶

Ted Bundy: Falling for a Killer was released as a full season drop on Amazon Prime in January 2020, telling the story from the perspective of Elizabeth Kendall, her daughter, Molly, and a host of other women including: Dr Donna Schram (psychiatrist who knew Bundy); Barbera Winslow (University of Washington Radical Women Group); Py Bateman (self-defence tutor), Jane Caputi (feminist scholar), Joanne Testa (friend of Lynda Healy); Phyllis Armstrong (friend of Georgeann Hawkins); Ginger Strand (author); Karen Sparks Epley (survivor); Karen Skevlam (housemate of Lynda Healy); Cheryl Martin (Washington State Police); Kathleen McChesney (detective); Jody Zimmerman and Vivian Winters (sister and mother of Susan Rancourt); Barbera Grossman (TV reporter); Carole DaRonch (survivor); Raelynn Shepherd (teacher at Debi Kent’s school); Diana Smith (friend of Carol Boone); Polly Nelson (lawyer). Focusing on so many stories from the female perspective works to undermine the mythos surrounding Bundy, “shattering your fascination for the man, shocking you with the ugly truth that media usually chooses to ignore” (Datta 2020). In agreement, *The Daily Dot* when reviewing *Falling for a Killer* said “we see him for everything he was: bullshit artist, molester, rapist, and killer. No time is wasted trying to humanise him. Bundy is shown as the wolf in sheep’s clothing he was” (Bond 2020). *Falling for a Killer* approaches the story from the female perspective and situates the story in its social, historical, political and cultural setting. The series describes the context of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when women were standing up for their rights, specifically beyond the domestic sphere. Second wave feminism was encouraging activism, education, and individual autonomy in terms of fertility and sexuality. It is significant that in this profound and crucial historical moment for women, Ted Bundy enacts his rage and violence. As Py Bateman states in the opening moments of episode 1 “Boy Meets Girl,” women were making all these strides and suddenly “you get walloped.” As Serba in *Decider* astutely notes “there’s a quietly seething sense of anger in

Falling for a Killer's opening moments, and its justified” (Serba 2020). Amidst this, is the “breath of fresh air” (Datta 2020) that *Falling for a Killer* brings, with the first female perspective documentary on Bundy, or rather, the women that Bundy hurt. Indeed, it is a full seven minutes and fifteen seconds before a man even speaks in episode 1. It is clear from the outset that this is “THE most important Bundy documentary ever made [...] for the first time, this is not Bundy’s story” (Datta 2020).

As stated, his name is synonymous with true crime, with America’s “iconic” figures. And yet, not many people could name one of the victims. As Helen Archer states, “in tales of violence against women, the man traditionally takes centre stage” (Archer 2020). *Falling for a Killer* is Elizabeth Kendall’s story, her daughter’s story, and the story of the women affected by Bundy, and the series “offers something of a corrective to the way in which Bundy is mythological and exposes the lifelong ripple effect of grief and sorrow” (Archer 2020). Approaching the story chronologically, *Falling for a Killer* begins – after we have been shown the socio-political contexts of the late 1960s and early 1970s in America, with the arrival of a young Elizabeth and her daughter to Seattle, as they embark on their new life. Once in Seattle and with a new job at the University of Washington, Elizabeth meets Ted. While he settles into their family, and daughter Molly takes to him and finds him in her own words “delightful,” Ted began committing heinous crimes.

The Victim’s Perspective

As much as the Bundy story is well known, and as much as the victims’ names remain unknown apart from to the families and those who might be particularly interested in true crime, *Falling for a Killer* in addition to bringing the female perspective also brought with it a number of revelations. For the first time, Karen Sparks Epley speaks out about how she was Bundy’s first victim, and survived with multiple injuries. Director Trish Wood introduces Epley from off camera, as even those well versed in the Bundy story would not know this woman’s name. Epley states quite clearly why she has not spoken before. She wanted to have her own life, and not be a victim, and she speaks to the times in which she was attacked, when women were expected to get on with their lives and to quietly hold secret their traumas. To point back to MFM and the support groups set up by the Murderinos, this contemporary, female led discourse around victims and serial killers is constructive in its approach, by not just telling the story but giving voices to women who previously did not speak, or can no longer speak, and creating spaces for women to find support following their own traumatic experiences. In encouraging Epley and all the other women in *Falling for a Killer* to speak, Trish Wood told *USA Today* that “I thought it was time for them to have their moment” (Jenson, 2020).

Falling for a Killer presents a raw and emotional response to the recounting of Elizabeth Kendall, Molly and all the other women as they tell their story.

Their grief, guilt and sorrow are clear from the outset. In episode 1, “Boy Meets Girl,” Kendall reads an excerpt from one of the many letters that Bundy wrote to her from prison. Extolling his everlasting love for her, Kendall states that letter in particular “still gets me.” She struggles to read it without her voice wobbling, an indicator of the story to come in which from Kendall’s perspective, she was in love with a man who was a monster, and has since struggled with guilt, self-doubt and alcoholism as a result.

The emotion and trauma is clearly explained by the women that speak in *Falling for a Killer*, as they talk of their experience, what happened to them or those they knew. Beautiful and intimate details about the victims are talked about, who they were, what they were like. The bodies of the victims – which we do not see in *Falling for a Killer*, only the occasional shot of a crime scene and its blood patches – rather than being emotionless sites of evidence that point to the male killer, they are instead living, breathing people in the words of those that remember them. Joanne Testa for example, recalls how she first met Lynda Healy. Phyllis Armstrong recalls how she went on trips with Georgann Hawkins. All these women who were University friends with victims recall the warm and wonderful lives that were brutally taken, and we can hear the long reaching trauma in each and every word that these women speak. These accounts contrast with MFM in the way in which community and empathy is built. In *Falling for a Killer* it is the presentation of the shared female experience of directly living through these events that promotes an understanding of grief and trauma. In MFM, the shared experience of hearing the story generates empathy for those that lived it, or were lost to it.

Emotional Verité

Stella Bruzzi (2016) wrote about the making of the true crime genre, and the codes and conventions therein. She said that these TV crime series revel in “evidence verité” in which the camera pores over crime scenes, autopsy photos, and in-court reactions. This imagery is always in intimate close-up, to heighten the affective emotional response. In *Falling for a Killer*, we have the same visual intimacy, as the women speaking are framed in head and shoulders close-up, but instead of the poring over crime scene or corpse imagery, the series presents emotional verité, as an extensive collection of photographs of Elizabeth, Molly and Ted in various family and domestic set ups are examined in detail. The camera slowly pans down a photograph of Elizabeth on Ted’s shoulders, a slow creep in on Ted showing a young Molly how to ride a bike, these pictures and more are intercut with Molly telling us how “we were like a family.” The early days of Ted and Elizabeth’s relationship were happy, warm, and hopeful. This emotional verité continues across the episodes. Laura Healy, younger sister of Lynda Healy who was killed in 1974, speaks over the Healy family archive of video footage, showing the young Lynda playing and interacting with her siblings and family. Stitched together in a montage, showing Lynda grow

up, we hear of the hopes and dreams of Lynda, her personable nature, and heartbreakingly, the loss her family felt when she was taken away from them. This emotional verité then, that *Falling for a Killer* presents in the real photos, the real family footage, gives a clear identity back to Lynda, and to the other women, an identity that had been stripped away by previous tellings of the Bundy story, where they were named only as victims, and described only with what Bundy did to them. Where MFM presents a comedic and cathartic response to Bundy, *Falling for a Killer* explores the emotion of grief. In contrast, a dispassionate response comes from Bailey Sarian, as she approaches the story from an impartial⁷ perspective.

Murder, Mystery and Make Up

In 2018, the Chris Watts case blew up across media⁸ and Bailey Sarian spoke about the case on her YouTube channel. Before this, her channel was a space for make-up tutorials and reviews, delivered in Bailey’s warm and chatty style. With the Watts case, Bailey, like much of the internet, was wanting to talk about the story in all of its mind-boggling detail. So, Bailey made a video in which she discussed the case, and applied her make-up at the same time as she “felt awkward just sitting on camera talking and I wanted to keep myself busy” (Jordan 2022). With this video, the *Murder, Mystery and Make Up* series was born. The series was and remains highly successful, with at the time of writing, earning Bailey 6.46 million subscribers, and the video in which she tackles Ted Bundy, has 8,818,430 views. The make-up tutorial has over the life span of YouTube become a stalwart of the platform, generating many stars and millions of dollars in revenue. The make-up video is currently highly underexamined, due to its connotations of frivolity and being inherently gendered feminine (despite a number of high- and low-profile YouTube make-up content creators being male/identifying as male), and has only so far come under discussion as a marker of post-feminism, as Chae notes that the make-up tutorial upholds “empowerment of women but with (hyper)sexualisation through self-surveillance and self-monitoring” (Chae 2021). With make-up application combined with true crime in Bailey Sarian’s series, the perceived worth of such content drops even lower, both being associated with women’s media.⁹

Following the structure of a usual make-up video, Bailey directly addresses the camera and speaks to the viewer in a casual manner that creates a sense of intimacy. It feels like a chat with a friend, a sentiment shared by many of her followers.¹⁰ Chae further explains that this intimacy in the vlog practice is essential to the YouTube make-up guru’s popularity, whereby even though some of the more “famous beauty creators are stars [they have] the girl-next-door- image so viewers can relate to them” (Chae 2021). Like MFM, Bailey does not try to be perfect – in fact one of the things a viewer can count on is Bailey mis-pronouncing names and locations – the videos feature side notes and distractions, all of which add to the feeling of an

intimate chat between friends. In this chat in which Bailey recounts the Bundy story, what else is she adding?

'Suspish.'

The combination of make-up and murder appears to some as “diametrically opposed subjects” (Jordan 2022), and that this “combination of real-life horrors and make-up is one odd combination” (Go 2021). However, I would argue that these two subjects slot together perfectly, both being as they are, gendered feminine. We have already seen that the primary audience for true crime is women, and make-up (despite contemporary views on gender and cosmetics evolving to be more diverse and inclusive of men) is traditionally an activity and interest for women. After the opening moments of Bailey’s Ted Bundy video, and she has gotten the introduction and nudge to like and subscribe out of the way, she explains why she has been reluctant to cover Bundy.

I get requested to do these two people the most [Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer] and for a long time, since beginning, I started this whole series, I’ve been putting off doing both of them, ‘cos I just felt like what can I add to this story, like, everything has literally been said, what else can I add? But I have to give the people what they want, and they’ve been asking for Mr Bundy.

In amongst Bailey’s catchphrases – “Suspish,” and “Ney Ney” – she tells the Bundy story but keeps it simple and factual. Her approach is in contrast to MFM and *Falling for a Killer*, in that it is seeking to be impartial, and her emotional response is arguably dispassionate. That is not to say that Bailey is cold, rather it is that she only wants to tell the facts in her awareness of the vast amount of material already available regarding Bundy.

The videos are not unlike a podcast in that the viewer has to reconstruct the visual imagery of the story in their own heads. Bailey replaces the usual supplied imagery of the violated female body that we would see on a TV documentary (such as *Conversations with a Killer*) with her own attractive and pretty face, applying make-up as a highly feminine act juxtaposed with the hyper-masculine violence in the story. Female bodily destruction is juxtaposed with female body celebration in the art of Bailey’s make-up application and in Bailey herself with her many colourful tattoos. Bailey is telling a story of extreme violence against women, but in her thoughtful yet temperate delivery is a resistance against the usual “visualisation of mutilated female bodies” (Greer 2018) we find in the many of the male-dominated tellings of the story. Seltzer notes, we live in a “wound culture,” in which “the endless spectre of a series of torn and opened bodies” permeates all media. He goes on to explain that the “spectacle of the torn and open body is also the conversion of bodies into information [which renders the once] private person to public

spectacle” (Seltzer 1998). Bailey does not show the bodies, affording them a degree of privacy that has been previously disallowed. However, Bailey does still describe some of the murders, but the visuals she provides are either focussed on beauty or supporting factual elements. Again, as Murley (2008) notes, the means of production shapes narrative, as Bailey speaks she inserts pictures that support the facts; images of maps showing the locations of where remains were found on Taylor Mountain, or the front page of *The Orlando Sentinel* with its headline relating to the Chi Omega attacks.

While describing the necrophilia, Bailey wipes away eyeshadow fallout. When she describes Bundy’s trophies (severed heads), she applies the perfect foundation base. At these examples of moments during the telling of extreme horror, the construction of the *Murder, Mystery and MakeUp* video acts in a way which speaks to contemporary media consumption habits and is very much like the practice of second screening. According to Nielson in 2022, 45% of audiences are using a second screen with the purpose of extra or added entertainment to their primary screen (Garaus and Wolfsteiner 2022), and most “use multiscreens in a manner unrelated to the [primary] content”¹¹ (Nee and Dozier 2017). Bailey provides the primary content (the true crime story) and she also supplies what might be on a second screen (the make-up application). In watching this video, the viewer is media multitasking: They are watching the make-up application, listening to the story, and like a podcast listener, reconstructing the visuals in their own imaginations. This is significant to note as media companies are well aware of second screening, and are working hard to exploit these new habits. In providing two distinct forms of content in one place – true crime and make-up- Bailey is arguably reducing the risk of her audiences second screening by providing what contemporary viewers would seek out: two types of media content at the same time. As stated above, production shapes narrative, but it also shapes emotional affect. Across the first two case studies there is a strong thread of empathy. In Bailey’s factual account is there empathy as the horrific story is told alongside the soothing beauty of make-up application? There is, Bailey is of course empathetic for the victims. In her edit she drops in moments of herself looking down, and saying “aw jeez” at particularly troubling facts, or looking out of the frame to muse for a second on these terrible events. She delivers the facts straight to camera, but her moments of personal empathy take her gaze away as she steps out of the straight facts and into a more emotionally driven moment of thought.

Victim Autonomy

Bailey asks what can be added to well-worn tale of Ted Bundy? But significantly, it is what Bailey leaves out of her recounting that adds to the story. Bailey does not name the victims. She says she does not want to speak for them, that she has no permission to name them, and perhaps the most important action that Bailey takes is in not reducing these women to this one

moment in their life. In an interview Bailey said that “I feel like I can’t speak for them unless I’m speaking to the family directly [as is done in *Falling for a Killer*]. They’ve lived such full lives, why be remembered for this one thing?” (Jordan 2022). By not giving their names Bailey is giving the women back their autonomy and their right to self-govern whether or not their names are used in a story which has through the mass of Bundy media, become public property. A person’s name is their identifier, with deep personal and familial connections. By not naming them, Bailey severs the connection between them and Bundy, empowering them to be their own, private people, away from his deplorable actions. When they are named in *Falling for a Killer*, it is by those that knew and loved them, and they are talked about and remembered for who they were, and not just as a list of women murdered by Bundy.

Conclusion

This chapter explores three case studies that take away Bundy’s monstrous power, and give autonomy and identity back to the women he killed and attacked. *My Favorite Murder* addresses head on the perceived problematic complicity in consumption of true crime. Unpacking the live show via the consideration of emotional affect exposes a response to the telling of this well-worn story that is empathic, sympathetic, and comedic. MFM adds compassion to the story, while taking away Bundy’s power through the catharsis of comedy. MFM as a constructive and progressive podcast generates social activism, as the fans develop mutual support groups. *Falling for a Killer* hears directly from the women involved, a key group previously unheard from. The Bundy mythos is shattered as the real lives are presented by emotional verité in family photographs, films, and very personal testimonies. The emotional response is overwhelming grief, but *Falling for a Killer* strips away Bundy because this retelling is not about him, it is about the women. Bailey Sarian pushes together two perceived feminine activities: make-up and interest in true crime. Her emotional response is dispassionate as she strives to be factual and moderate in her account. The beauty of the female body is a marked resistance to the violated female body that is usually presented in Bundy media. Included in Bailey’s resistance to the usual presentation of the victims, is in her affordance of privacy to those who have otherwise become public property, by not naming the victims and reducing their lives down to one moment of violence. And lastly, *Murder, Mystery and Make Up* presents media multitasking in one place, inadvertently solving a major problem faced by larger media industries, speaking to contemporary viewing habits and acknowledging that modern true crime, as all these three case studies demonstrate, is more than gratuitous poring over bloodied evidence. It is creative, can be progressive, confronts grief head on, supports trauma, and most importantly, strips power away from those that are violent towards women and gives women back their voices.

Notes

- 1 *The Deliberate Stranger* (Marvin J. Chomsky, 1986); *The Stranger Beside Me* (Sandor Stern, 1995); *Bundy: A Legacy of Evil* (Michael Fieffer, 2009); *Ted Bundy: An American Monster* (Daniel Farrands, 2017); *Ted Bundy: Serial Monster* (Greer, 2018); *Ted Bundy: An American Bogeyman* (Daniel Farrands, 2021). This is not an exhaustive list, simply a snapshot of the biopics, films, made for TV movies and series, that are by men, about Bundy.
- 2 We see this across many cases, for example Michael Peterson’s case as examined in *The Staircase* (Canal+, 2004, and Netflix from 2018). This documentary took Peterson’s side, showing much from the side of the defence, and only small parts from the prosecution. It was not until the HBO dramatization – *The Staircase* – in 2022, that the victim, Kathleen Peterson’s voice, was heard.
- 3 As well as being a TV producer and writer, Kilgraff began her career in stand up in the 1990s, and Hardstark worked on TV in various comedy guises including comedic cocktail making for the Food Network, and comedy via YouTube, before pairing up with Kilgraff to create *My Favorite Murderer*.
- 4 Zapata was a singer in the Seattle punk band, The Gits. She was murdered in 1993.
- 5 I would encourage anyone interested in the Bundy case to read Elizabeth Kendall’s book, *The Phantom Prince*.
- 6 I am not going to go into this too much, but it is worth pointing out a moment Kendall speaks about, when after having spent a full day with a detective, showing him pictures of Ted, explaining her life with him in intimate detail, when Kendall called the detective a few days later, he had no idea who she was. These oversights, or just plain refusals to listen to Kendall and other women during Bundy’s active killing years and while in prison, allowed Bundy to commit many more murders.
- 7 Impartial in that Bailey is neither from Seattle, nor was she in any way involved with the events, or knew any of the victims or families.
- 8 Chris Watts eventually admitted to murdering his pregnant wife, Shannann Ruzcek and her two children, Bella and Celeste in 2018.
- 9 The same thing can be observed with other types of media not getting the attention they deserve as they are perceived to be of little worth: The soap opera, reality TV. These things are fluff, and not, apparently, worthy of scholarly attention. This is of course nonsense, and they deserve as much academic attention as the latest glossy drama output from HBO or the BBC.
- 10 Subscriber Hailey Strait comments on the video titled “1 Of America’s Most Notorious, Ted Bundy” with “why do I feel like Baileys my friend and we’ve never met.” Amythyst replies to Strait with “I think she’d be a fantastic BFF!”
- 11 For example, a viewer might have the news on TV, primary content they are listening to, and at the same time be scrolling through social media on their smartphone.

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