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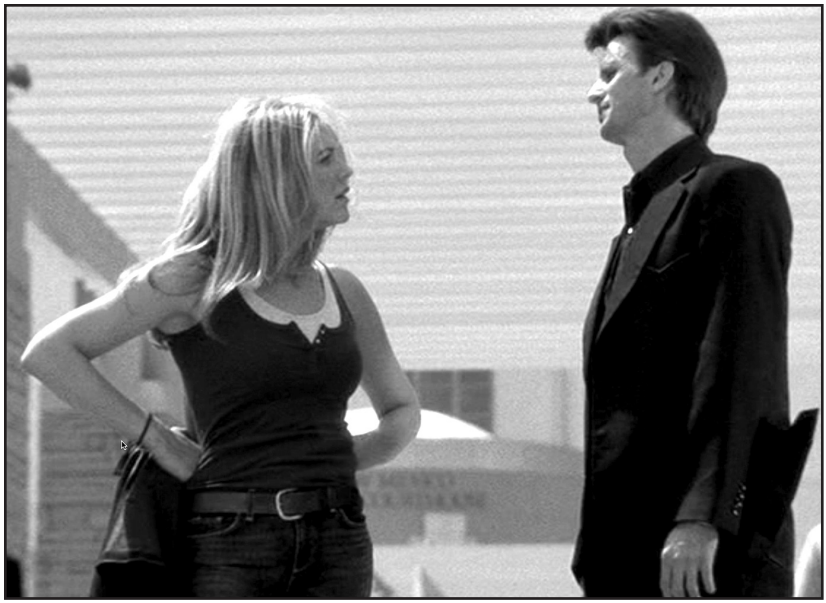

Generally surly and skeptical, Mary often argues with her more empathetic partner, Marshal Marshall Mann. From *In Plain Sight*.

The always sexy Gemma gets her husband, Clay, to submit to her demands. From *Sons of Anarchy*.

She Hits Like a Man, but She Kisses Like a Girl: TV Heroines, Femininity, Violence, and Intimacy

Kerry Fine

While western television shows of the past generally gave audiences attractive, well-coiffed women who fulfilled the traditional roles of the hero's leading lady, contemporary series have seemingly caught up with the women's movement. Characters such as Dale Evans and Miss Kitty handled guns, but only when necessary, and primarily served as the sidekick to the hero. Now our small-screen western women pack pistols without hesitation, wear the pants, and command the screen. Gemma Teller Morrow of the California-set motorcycle soap opera *Sons of Anarchy (*also referred to as *SOA,* 2008–present*)* and federal Marshal Mary Shannon of Albuquerque-set *In Plain Sight* (2008–present) are two such characters. But have western heroines really gained equality? What can be learned from the evolution of the character of the western woman? While both Gemma and Mary appropriate heroic character traits more generally assigned to male characters in western American culture they also display traits which could undermine their heroic powers. Gemma is highly sexualized in traditionally feminine ways and positioned as the "queen" to her "king" husband, whereas Mary fears emotional intimacy in a way that cripples her. However, I argue that the interaction of these traditional masculine and feminine gender markers subverts gender performance and the constructed male/female gender binary. Traditional depictions of heroic power in western literature and film suggest that heroic power is inherently masculine, a "natural" attribute of men. In creating female characters who wield heroic power, the masculine nature of heroism is called into question, and the socially constructed terms of who is permitted to exercise that power are redefined.

The American West has consistently functioned as an environment in which heroes are made. The savage nature of the wilderness serves as a testing ground in which men develop their moral fiber in defeating the untamed environment and the "uncivilized" races living there. It is through action that the character of the hero is developed and revealed. As Lee Clark Mitchell argues in his important work on masculinity in the Western, violent action is accentuated in order "to provide the hero with conditions for self-definition" (169). Throughout the Western

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world, heroes in literature and film are overwhelmingly male. In the literature of the American West, the male hero is especially dominant. While heroic figures often vary from culture to culture and in specific time periods, heroes in the Western genre generally share some characteristics. They are usually attractive and virile with above-average intelligence, strength, and endurance. Heroes are important in that their primary role is to protect or rescue somebody—in most cases, a woman or a group of people too weak to protect themselves. Richard Slotkin proposes that "the triumph of civilization over savagery is symbolized by the hunter/warrior's rescue of the White woman held captive by savages" (15). This version of the American hero in the "Myth of the Frontier" positions the male hero as a protector and savior of the weak white female who traditionally symbolizes passive, civilized, domestic society.

Heroes embody the qualities generally attributed to toughness. Sherrie A. Inness notes that our culture typically defines these as "the antithesis of femininity," and therefore these qualities are often associated with active masculinity rather than passive femininity (12). However, Judith Butler posits that gender is not based on biological essences that are natural attributes of males and females, but instead gender is produced, controlled, and maintained by social strictures (192). Just as heroic qualities fluctuate and metamorphose over time and in different cultures, so do the qualities associated with masculinity and femininity: "We need to reflect on the many ways that toughness is used ... to maintain the gender status quo by suggesting the essential toughness of men and the essential lack of toughness of women. The ways we think of toughness ... need to be considered because toughness and issues concerning toughness ... continually shape our ideas about appropriate gender roles for women and men" (Inness 10). As tough women, Gemma and Mary have the potential to challenge and undermine female gender roles by appropriating the characteristics of toughness generally associated with the masculine. Gemma and Mary are not simply tough women; they are heroic women because they use their toughness to act as protectors.

Toughness and aggression, especially as they relate to the traditional active-masculine/passive-feminine dichotomy, are characteristics of the heroic. Aggression is another characteristic that is often associated with the masculine. And while aggression does not have gender, we tend to align certain kinds of aggression with gender. As Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* (1990), the apparent male/female duality of sex has lead to cultural constructions of gender that tend to be restricted to that duality. In other words, traits are conceptualized as being either male or female. This would mean that to be a particular sex automatically assigns one of the two sets of gendered behaviors to a subject. Furthermore, Butler contends that gender is a cultural interpretation of a sexed body:

> Because there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions. (190)

It is the practice of certain behaviors and affectations that inscribe the boundaries of gender, and those very boundaries are continually enforced through the practice of the performed gender. Because genders tend to be inscribed in polar and dualistic terms, gender performances that violate the discrete boundaries of the binary interrupt the performance and expose its constructed nature. As tough, aggressive protectors, Gemma and Mary trouble the traditional masculine construction of heroic power and expose it as a production of cultural performance.

According to developmental psychologist Kaj Björkqvist, there are two basic types of aggression: indirect aggression and direct physical aggression.[1] Indirect aggression is a kind of social manipulation "in which the instigator manipulates others to attack the victim, or, by other means, makes use of the social structure in order to harm the target person," without being personally involved in the attack (Björkqvist and Niemelä 8). Direct physical aggression has two sub-types: expressive aggression and instrumental aggression. Expressive aggression, also referred to as impulsive aggression, is marked by strong emotion, especially anger, and is aimed at hurting someone. For example, in 2003, a Houston jury found orthodontist Dr. Clara Harris guilty of killing her philandering husband by driving over him repeatedly with her Mercedes Benz. During the sentencing, the jury declared that in killing her husband, Dr. Harris had "acted with 'sudden passion.'" Because they felt that the act was impulsive, rather than calculated, Harris was spared from a possible ninety-nine-year sentence (Madigan). This kind of aggression is generally reactive, associated with feminine gender norms, and includes aggression such as self-defense (Sechrist and White 87).[2] Instrumental aggression is the form of aggression most explicitly linked with the masculine. It is often described as "cool," meaning that this aggression is formulated with forethought and carried out purposefully. Because this type of aggression is proactive, it fits neatly into the active/passive gender binary, solidifying its association with the masculine. Instrumental aggression is not an end in itself; it is intended to elicit some other end, compelling another to submit to your control, for example.

The hero often makes use of instrumental aggression in the quest to protect the weak. Figures such as John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, and, more recently, Daniel Craig pull their guns and swing their fists in

defense of women, children, and entire towns of defenseless homesteaders. Westerns traditionally pair male heroes with charges who must be protected, and that protection is carried out with the liberal use of instrumental aggression. Both Gemma and Mary use aggression to protect their charges as well. In Gemma's case, she acts as a mother to her son and grandson but also to an entire motorcycle club, while Mary's job as a US Marshal in the Witness Security Program, or WITSEC, requires her to protect federal witnesses. Their association with instrumental, masculine, aggression and with the role of the protector identifies them as heroic figures, reinscribing their performances of gender. They appropriate masculine aggression, creating masculine roles for themselves and thus violating feminine gender performance. They, however, are not punished for this transgression. Within the fabula of each series, the women do not suffer narrative "punishments" such as being killed off at the end of an episode or season, for example. In a wider context, viewers seem to approve of the characters, evidenced by the fact that both programs were renewed for several seasons.[3] Butler points out that "as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. ... [I]ndeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (190). But rather than suffering the consequences of reinscribing their gender performance, Gemma and Mary successfully appropriate behaviors marked as masculine and broaden the range of feminine gender markers. These characters move the traditionally masculine-marked behaviors of heroic power out of the realm of the male and in so doing reveal the socially constructed nature of that heroic power.

Both Gemma and Mary use instrumental aggression, but through quite different means. Gemma is what Richard Slotkin would term an

Gemma threatens Jax's ex-wife not to seek custody of Abel.

"outlaw hero" figure, and Mary is a much sexier US Marshal than Matt Dillon ever was. Slotkin posits that the figure of the outlaw hero emerged in response to issues of social justice. Rather than protecting the values of a gentrified society, these heroes were responding "to injustices perpetrated by corrupt officials acting at the behest of powerful moneyed interests" (127–28). Indeed, these "heroes are criminals drawn to banditry by a mixture of social injustice and an innate propensity or 'gift' for antisocial behavior" (127). Gemma serves as a protector of her immediate family, her extended family, the Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club, Redwood Original (SAMCRO), and the entire town of Charming. The show's creators describe the series as "an adrenalized drama with darkly comedic undertones that explores a notorious outlaw motorcycle club's (MC) desire to protect its livelihood while ensuring that their simple, sheltered town of Charming, California remains exactly that, Charming. The MC must confront threats from drug dealers, corporate developers, and overzealous law officers" ("About the Show"). This positioning of the club members as the protectors of small-town values pits them against the villainous forces of capitalism, race separatists, and other evils that work to overturn the values of the town. Thus, they are quite clearly the outlaw heroes that Slotkin describes (154, 379).

As an outlaw hero, Gemma uses instrumental violence in protection of her family and in pursuit of justice. After finding and following the woman who had led her into a trap which resulted in her rape, Gemma explains her murderous intentions to fellow "old lady" Tara:[4] "My son, my husband, the brothers, they're out there risking their lives, their freedom, for me. This is how I do my part. God's put her in my path so I can fix that part of me that they ripped open. I'm supposed to do this" (2.13). As the men of SAMCRO track down and kill those who were

Mary apprehends the man who shot her in the cliffhanger of season 2.

involved in Gemma's rape, she takes an active role in pursuing her own justice. Her language is framed in terms of liberty and religious predestination. With her gun drawn, she confronts the woman who then turns on Gemma with her gun. Unflinchingly, Gemma fires, hitting the woman in the chest and killing her. In other words, Gemma, like so many Western male heroes before her, operates under the validation of justified violence. The use of instrumental aggression in the form of the traditional showdown, or standoff, often features heavily in the figuration of the western heroic character. As an outlaw hero, Gemma also uses a gun, the symbol of male power, to exact justice.

In Plain Sight falls into the cop genre. One of the standards of the cop genre is that the central character's use of violence is a morally justified response to the immorality of the villain (Brown, "Bullets" 81). The central character "must be a force for good" (Dole 79). Carol Dole argues that because of this standard, "traditional notions of the good woman—modest, faithful, virtuous, cooperative, and deserving of protection—come most clearly into conflict with expectations for the action hero—fearless, independent, physically dominant, and the protector of others" (79). The set of behaviors and expectations for the male and the female are very clearly transgressed when a woman steps into the role of law enforcement hero. In order to function in this role, she must exert gendered behaviors more generally associated with the masculine, and, most important, this includes physical dominance and working to protect others. Instrumental aggression is key in these attributes. After all, with instrumental aggression the threat of aggression can be just as compelling as actual aggression, and physical dominance provides a visual indicator that one is capable of carrying out aggression. Both actresses are already physically imposing—Katey Sagal is 5'9"; Mary McCormack, 5'8"—and both routinely wear high-heeled boots, which puts them close to 6'. These women often tower over other characters, male and female alike.

Because of her work as a US Marshal, Mary must often use instrumental aggression in fulfillment of her duties. Our first exposure to Mary as a wielder of instrumental aggression establishes her as a physically dominant protector and sets the tone for most of her future encounters with real and potential threats. In this confrontation, she follows a potential suspect in the murder of one of her charges into the men's room of a seedy roadside bar. As Mary enters the bar, her voiceover narration foreshadows the interaction that follows. She tells us, "Frankie Junior got killed on my watch. That just pisses me off" (1.1). We understand that having failed to protect a witness puts Mary on the offensive. In this scene, the viewer looks up at Mary as her figure fills the frame from top to bottom. The urinating suspect, on the other hand, is initially viewed straight on in a medium shot. The viewer sees him as Mary might; while he is very close to her, he is not more physically imposing.

As the man turns toward her, she asks, "What's your name? And did you kill those two kids?" As though to dismiss the directness and authority of her questions, the man says, "I'm sorry, are you talking to me?" Mary reasserts her authority by replying with a laugh, "That's so cute. It's like one of those mini taquitos they serve at happy hour." The man again attempts to gain control of the exchange by advancing toward Mary as he replies, "Oh yeah, you want some?" She replies by grabbing the bar of soap from the sink and forcefully hurling it into the man's groin. The soap makes contact with a crunching thud, and at this point, her body motion resembles that of a Major League pitcher, complete with follow-through. The choice of the non-lethal soap, as opposed to immediately drawing her gun and possibly shooting the man, demonstrates that she has calculated how to proceed in a way that will place her in the more powerful position in the interaction, eliciting the desired result. Implementing aggression for the purpose of obtaining another end is a use of instrumental aggression. The man sinks to his knees. The camera cuts to the man on the floor and then cuts to a low-angle shot of Mary standing over the man with her gun drawn. Together with the now incapacitated man, we view her as she towers over us with her weapon, at

Mary mocking the urinating suspect by sizing up his manhood and comparing it to a "mini taquito," although she later apologizes for the joke.

once a symbol of masculine law enforcement authority and of the masculine power of the phallus. She continues the interrogation by asking, "Now, what do you say you answer my questions before I drag you out of here by your surprisingly small wee-wee?" (1.1). Mary answers the man's phallic threat with a phallic threat of her own. Her use of instrumental aggression serves as a defense against threatened physical and sexual violence and persuades the man to cooperate.

Mary fully appropriates the traditionally masculine authority of the law enforcement hero and the character traits that accompany that authority. Dole notes that in the 1980s and '90s, Hollywood cop films which featured the "Woman with a Gun" worked to offset possible gender anxiety arising from the figure of the armed and authoritative woman by undercutting the power of the heroic female cop figure (79). Female cops of the films that Dole critiques have "both motivations and vulnerabilities associated with traditional femininity" which allow the films to empower the female lead without disempowering the men of the film (81). Dole goes on to argue that "these films construct the woman's will to (fire)power as defensive, not aggressive. Cinematic female law enforcers wish to protect those weaker than themselves; never men, but always women or children, ideally female children" (81). For example, Megan Turner (Jamie Lee Curtis) in *Blue Steel* (1989) becomes a law enforcement officer to protect women who suffer domestic abuse, like her mother. By contrast, Mary routinely protects men, setting her apart from the armed women who came before her. Unlike them, she is not undermined by feminine and masculine gender constructs.

Rather than imbuing Mary with traditional feminine gender norms for the purpose of avoiding the potential disempowerment of men, the series pairs her with a male partner who also challenges gender constructs. In this, *In Plain Sight* differs quite sharply from *SOA* While the men of *SOA* enact hypermasculinity, US Marshal Marshall Mann blends active and heroic masculinity with nurturing emotional sensitivity. Marshall and Mary operate as complementary, rather than oppositional, members of a pair. Marshall appropriates feminine gender norms and broadens masculine gender constructs, resulting in a character who uses instrumental violence when acting as the protector of others. As a male law enforcement officer, he often handles situations and witnesses with much greater warmth than his female partner. Marshall is not disempowered by Mary precisely because the characters, rather than tidily falling into a male/female gender binary, challenge those constructions that would allow only one of them to be masculine and one feminine. Additionally, as a safely heteronormative man with an attractive girlfriend, Marshall is presented as a man who can assume traditionally feminine traits without the consequence of emasculation. While Mary often operates as the heroic figure, Marshall can also enact this role. As

a result, *In Plain Sight* manages to negotiate Mary's appropriation of masculine gender norms and to present us with a male character who complements the female hero.

Because of its format as a weekly television series that features a new case in each episode, the marshals' charges vary widely over the course of each season. Mary's job frequently requires that she protect men we would not think of as emasculated. For example, in episode 3.4, "Whistle Stop," she protects a male witness in a federal money-laundering case from being murdered. The witness attempts to use his evidence to strong-arm those he is testifying against. His plan backfires and he is kidnapped by armed goons. Mary rescues the witness when she physically disarms and incapacitates, by kneeing and punching, one of the goons. Dole identifies about half a dozen ways in which the female cop is undercut, but interestingly Mary does not suffer from any of these challenges to her heroic power. She must, instead, work hard to negotiate her personal relationships in ways that more traditionally feminine characters do not.

Known to her coworkers and family members as surly, brusque, and non-communicative, Mary is deficient in those emotional qualities generally linked with feminine gender constructions. Lacking sensitivity and openness, she often struggles to meet emotional challenges. In her dealings with her witnesses, Mary states that she must "play mother, father, best friend, priest, rabbi, [and] marriage counselor" (1.1). This means that despite her curmudgeonly demeanor, she must often stretch outside of her normal behaviors and exercise the more feminine gender attributes of a supportive and caring nurturer. Interestingly, this complication arises from the positioning of Mary as a marshal in the WITSEC program. Because she must attend to the physical security of her witnesses *and* also ensure that they settle into their new lives with as little difficulty as possible, the show adds a level of emotional engagement on the part of the law enforcement hero not required in typical cop-genre films and television series. The tough action hero, often defined by traits such as physical endurance and athletic prowess, is generally a character marked by his ability to act and not by his level of emotional engagement with other characters. In this way, the male characters enact masculine gender standards that associate the masculine with the physical and active. As Butler argues, "gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (191). In other words, active heroism is not a characteristic that naturally arises from males because they are males but is a characteristic that over time has been associated with masculine gender norms. When a male character performs this particular aspect of gendered behavior, it is considered natural. However, when a female character performs active heroism, the performance is

Mary putting on a sexy phone voice to locate a potential suspect.

interrupted by the seeming incongruity. By positioning Mary as more than a protector of physical wellbeing, the series explores her navigation of masculine gender traits and her negotiation of more traditional constructions of the "natural" role of the feminine as nurturing. And Mary is aware that often the most challenging part of her job is the emotional element. As she notes at the conclusion of one episode: "Ultimately, in sickness and in health, for better or worse, when you look at your life with a hard, unflinching eye, there's only one real certainty: the growing never stops" (4.7). Because the series presents us with a character who must confront feminine as well as masculine gender constructions, her struggle to cope with emotional demands, rather than being a challenge to her appropriation of masculine authority and aggression, shapes Mary into a complex character. Instead of simply presenting us with an uncomplicated and potentially two-dimensional character, *In Plain Sight* acknowledges the knotty and often contradictory characteristics present in gender constructions and reveals the constructed nature of gendered performances.

Like Mary's negotiation of gender constructs, Gemma's produces sometimes problematic results. While she does successfully broaden the feminine gender construct to allow her to serve as a heroic protector, she must also negotiate gender relations that are quite polarized. In *SOA*, Gemma may stand alongside her husband, Clay, as an outlaw hero, but her sexuality is limited in ways that his is not. The women of the club are quite often referred to in terms that position them as sexual objects: "crow eater," "sweet butt," "bitch," and "gash" are all common references to women who have not achieved the coveted old lady status. Once the

woman becomes an old lady, her relationship with her male partner becomes monogamous on the part of the woman, but not necessarily on the part of the man. The monogamy required of the woman reflects the change in the power structure of the couple. The man "owns" and controls the woman's sexuality, but she does not own or control his. This inequality has the potential to undercut Gemma's power.

Gemma, again like Mary, does seem to be a woman in control of her sexuality. In her case, however, this is within the confines of a monogamous relationship; indeed, she is quite often depicted enjoying consensual, mutually fulfilling sexual relations with Clay. Yet her relationship with Clay is affected by the strongly contrasting gender constructions at work within the club. While she may enjoy the status of sexual subject in her relationship, Gemma cannot require the same monogamy of Clay that he requires of her. This dynamic is apparent when a "sweet butt" named Cherry arrives at the clubhouse and Gemma realizes that Clay engaged in sexual relations with the woman. As she recounts the incident to another old lady, Gemma's response makes it clear that when he is not in Charming, Clay has sexual license: "The rules got broken. What happens on a run, stays on a run. It does not show up and slap me in the goddamn face. That does not happen to me!" (1.6). This infers that as long as Gemma is not disgraced by another woman, Clay does not have to be monogamous.

Interestingly, Clay's sexual relations with Cherry are not simply for sexual satisfaction; they also serve as a way to assert his authority over a prospect who oversteps his bounds of sexual propriety by referring to Gemma in sexual terms.[5] In his conversation with a club member, the prospect comments that he thinks Gemma is a MILF (a contemporary acronym for "mother I'd like to fuck"). Clay overhears this comment, and therefore, when the prospect displays interest in Cherry, Clay physically takes her from him. This act conveys several things at once: (1) Clay displays his authority over the prospect; (2) he does so by enforcing his ownership over Cherry, who, as a "sweet butt," is not even a sexual subject but simply a sexual object; and (3) Clay exerts a sexual freedom not open to the women in the club. This sexual inequality comes into question again when, after Gemma's rape, she fears that Clay will reject her. She tells Tara, "Men need to own their pussy. His has been violated" (2.11). The prohibition governing the monogamy of old ladies is so strong that even a nonconsensual encounter threatens to destabilize a marriage. While her fears prove to be unfounded, we cannot ignore the troubling implications. Gemma may wield masculine heroic power, but she may not violate the rigid and hierarchical gender structure governing sexuality that places women firmly at the bottom.

While this strong polarization and regulation of male and female sexual activity as well as the consistent conceptualization of women as

sexual objects is problematic in its potential to undermine Gemma's heroic power, her character manages to avoid this destabilization. Feminist philosopher Karen J. Warren asserts that a dualistic masculine/feminine binary is a reflection of an oppressive conceptual framework that engages in value-hierarchical thinking, and "by attributing greater value to that which is higher, the Up-Down organization of reality serves to legitimate inequality" (46). If masculine and feminine gender traits do not naturally arise from male or female sexed bodies but are culturally constructed and self-reinforcing performances, and value-hierarchical thinking attributes greater value to the masculine than to the feminine, then the unequal treatment of the feminine is legitimated on the grounds that it is inferior to the masculine.

This standard of privileging the masculine and treating the feminine unequally is clearly apparent between most of the male and female characters in *SOA* However, Gemma does not experience the unequal treatment of the other female characters because she enjoys a position of unique authority in the club. She is not marginalized by being relegated to the status of a mere sex object. Gemma is Clay's most trusted advisor, and, quite frequently, she directs his actions and decisions. Although this dynamic shifts during the 4th season, Gemma remains an important figure in the direction of the club. And while her son, Jax, tries to convince himself that she is "just an old lady," her position proves to be much more than that of Clay's subservient woman (4.1). As Clay points out, "it ain't that simple" (4.2). Because her character wields power and authority uncharacteristic of most of the women in the series—with Jax's old lady, Tara, as an exception—Gemma does not neatly fit into the value-hierarchical structure into which the other women are relegated. So while the series in general reinforces the gender binary and traditional gender performances, Gemma's character resists the simple classification as feminine. In seizing a position of influence, the character reveals the unequally constructed nature of the power balance between the genders and circumscribes a new performance of the feminine.

Some critics, such as Carol Clover in her seminal *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* (1992) on gender in horror films, have tended to label strong, intelligent, and aggressive female characters stand-ins for the male viewer. In essence, rather than these actions making the women female heroes, it can make them "men-in-drag" (Brown, "Looks" 58). Such critics might argue that Gemma's and Mary's appropriation of the hero figure and their use of instrumental aggression is nothing more than a female character acting like a man. Clover's analysis, however, and the analysis of many feminist critics can become hopelessly ensnared in the language of the gender binary. Elizabeth Hills contends:

> One of the reasons why action heroines have been difficult to conceptualize as heroic *female* characters is the binaristic

> logic of the theoretical models on which a number of feminist theorists have relied. For example, feminists working within the dominant theoretical model of psychoanalysis have had extremely limited spaces within which to discuss the transformative and transgressive potential of the action heroine. ... From this perspective, active and aggressive women in the cinema can only be seen as phallic, unnatural or "figuratively male." (39)

As Hills astutely points out, theories that rely on the dual gender model cannot effectively escape the confines of that model in order to satisfactorily explain the effectiveness and popularity of women who successfully undermine gender dualism. Indeed, much of the initial and influential work on tough and heroic women tends to be constrained by more philosophically traditional thinking that, because it relies on the dual gender model, becomes mired in its inability to escape the concepts of femaleness and maleness. In turn, those theories lead to the reinforcement of the value-hierarchical logic that undergirds the gender binary. Further, the traditional dual gender model cannot make accommodations for women who are quite clearly female sexed yet appropriate traditional masculine gender markers. In the case of Gemma and Mary, both characters are very strongly female identified in ways that make it difficult, if not preposterous in the case of Mary's pregnancy, to construe the characters as figurative males.

Both characters certainly are feminine, yet their femininity is combined with toughness, not replaced by it, resulting in a new standard for feminine beauty. By associating the traits of heroism with the characters' feminized features, the characters present a new type of feminine sex appeal. This is very strongly evident in the opening credits of *SOA*: A series of close-ups in sepia tones never reveals the actors' faces. The first actor credited in the sequence is Charlie Hunnam. His clothing is dark, and our eye is drawn to his bare, muscular, white forearm as it fills the screen diagonally; in his hand, we can see the shining black handle of the large knife—a phallic symbol of masculine power and violence—which he normally carries on his belt. The sequence then cuts to a close-up of actress Katey Sagal, costumed as Gemma. The camera pans slightly across Sagal's chest emphasizing the area from just above her bare collarbone to the center of her breasts. Her white tank top plunges very low, exposing her generous cleavage; she lightly moves her hand down the scar that runs the length of her sternum. The scar itself is a symbol of Gemma's toughness in that it resulted from heart surgery to correct a genetic heart defect from which she continues to suffer. While this juxtaposition of feminine breasts with the masculine scar is interesting by itself, it is also significant because the introduction of this character differs drastically from the way the male actors are

Gemma, always wearing low-cut tops, never hides the scar from her heart surgery.

credited. Like the opening image of Hunnam, conservatively clothed and bearing a symbol of masculine power, the subsequent shots of the other male actors draw our attention only to their toughness, not to their sex appeal. In this pairing, the Gemma sequence is unique. While Gemma is initially presented as the erotic object who connotes Laura Mulvey's "*to-be-looked-at-ness*," our erotic gaze is disrupted by the scar (27). Mulvey associates the display of woman as sexual object and erotic spectacle with the passive/feminine. The scar, which is a visual reminder of Gemma's toughness, disrupts any association of her with the passive and constructs her as an active subject who fulfills feminine beauty standards and then redefines them too.

The characters are also associated with the feminine in that both women are targets for sexual assault in ways that men generally are not. As Mulvey notes, "according to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification" (27–28). The female characters, as the erotic objects for the viewer, then, are traditionally positioned as sexual objects. Mary and Gemma, however, in avoiding the intentions of their attackers—in Mary's case, her sexual violation and murder; in Gemma's

case, her emotional destabilization—escape simple classification as objects. We do not view their bodies as objects because both characters act in ways that develop them as subjects. The purpose of the sexual assault is not to sexualize their bodies but to expose the characters to situations that will reveal their heroic nature. In the season 2 opening episode, Gemma is gang-raped because, as the orchestrator of the rape reveals in the following episode, "unraveling the matriarch will destabilize them. They're all little boys who need a strong mommy" (2.2). Indeed, it seems that Gemma knows her rape was intended to destroy the club from the inside out because she delays revealing the truth until she can do it in such a way that unites the club rather than undermines it. This suggests that part of her toughness lies in her ability to endure and to continue negotiating the structure of the power struggle between the club and its rivals. She delays seeking justice, through the use of instrumental aggression, until she can engineer the situation so that she reaps maximum benefit. It is the calculated nature of instrumental aggression that most often causes it to be associated with the masculine.

While Gemma is the strategic target of sexual violence specifically because she is the woman at the center of the club, Mary very nearly experiences rape because she is a target of opportunity. At the end of season 1, Mary is kidnapped by drug dealers who mistake her for her sister (1.11). When they discover that she is the wrong sister and a US Marshal to boot, they decide to kill her. The man tasked with the job attempts to rape her before he shoots her. Mary's position as a woman makes her vulnerable to sexual assault. She stands with her hands chained to a post in front of her and the attacker behind her. While it may seem that Mary is at a disadvantage, the way we view the mise-en-scène suggests an equality of position, and indeed, this power balance will soon favor Mary as she uses her heroic qualities to rescue herself.

The act that feminizes her also empowers her. Convincing the man to let her turn around, Mary is able to head-butt him, and we now view her from the same position as her former attacker; she towers over us in a low-angle shot that emphasizes the powerlessness of the man as he writhes on the floor. In a series of shot/reverse-shot cuts, the viewer moves between viewing Mary as she works her hands free and the man as he recovers and grabs a shovel. Shot/reverse-shot cuts are generally used to give viewers the sense that they are observing a conversation. In this case, we become viewers of a back-and-forth conversation of aggression and power. Mary ducks to avoid the shovel and retrieves her backup gun from her ankle holster, which literally and symbolically empowers her. As she fires, she rises and the man falls, signifying her position in the dynamic. Significantly, she saves herself from sexual assault rather than having to rely on a male character to save her. She is both feminine in that she is vulnerable to sexual assault and masculine in that she uses instrumental violence to ward off her attacker. In

presenting us with a female character who executes her own rescue, the series exposes the constructed nature of heroic as "naturally" masculine and redefines standards for femininity to include controlled aggression and toughness.

In addition to complicating a simple classification of Gemma and Mary as sexual objects, the violence against these two characters reflects and transforms the long tradition in Westerns of violence against the male body. Mitchell argues that "Westerns treat the hero as a rubber doll, something to be wrenched and contorted so that we can then watch him magically recover his shape" (182). The perennial presence of the "beating scenario" in Western literature and film provides us with a male body that is beaten and violated precisely so that we can watch the hero recover his masculine strength and virility, proving the "body's *natural* essence" is "unmistakably male" (170, 183, 183). This scenario, however, is complicated when applied to the body of a female hero.

In the beating and gang rape of Gemma and the forcible kidnapping and attempted rape of Mary, the women's bodies are displayed in ways that make them unmistakably female. Additionally, we do not get the protracted "convalescent narrative" described by Mitchell in which the male hero, severely beaten and left for dead, is nursed back to health by a woman (179). Nevertheless, these series participate in the "beating scenario." In addition to her beating and gang rape, Gemma is also

Proud mom Gemma with her son, Jax, and her grandson, Abel.

beaten by Clay at the end of season 4. And Mary is the subject of another violent assault when she is shot in season 2. While we do not watch women attend to Gemma or Mary, we do witness both characters regain their physical and emotional health. In the restoration and recovery of their toughness, we see echoes of Mitchell's restored Western hero who "becomes what he already is" during the process of recuperation (187). Indeed, after discovering the identity of the man who shot her, Mary acts to apprehend him before she is fully convalesced, thus, showing that she has recovered her masculine heroic power.

Gemma's and Mary's positions as mothers naturally identify them with the female. Gemma is the mother of two sons and the grandmother of two grandsons, Abel and Thomas, with whom she is very involved as a nurturer and caregiver. She works to guide Jax through his young manhood in order to craft him into the next club president, and she also goes to great lengths to secure the return of Abel when he is kidnapped. In season 3, she even goes so far as to threaten to kill a baby in an Irish orphanage in order to solicit Abel's whereabouts from a reluctant nun (3.11). In this case, Gemma is more than a protective mother in the traditional sense. After discovering that the Irish orphanage has already adopted out the missing Abel and will not provide further information, Jax, Opie (another member of the club), and Gemma begin to leave the orphanage. Gemma feigns chest pain in order to get close enough to the I.R.A. soldier guarding the orphanage to seize his gun. Neither Jax nor Opie are armed, and in disarming the I.R.A. soldier, Gemma becomes the sole possessor of phallic power. She then uses this power as a means to an end. In other words, she employs instrumental aggression with forethought, not simply for violence's sake and not as a reaction, but in order to elicit the location of her grandson.

While it may seem that her figuration as the protective (grand) mother might somehow feminize her aggression to be socially acceptable, the scene is arranged to make it clear that she is not acting on simple maternal instinct, a socially constructed gendered behavior in itself, but that she wields instrumental aggression in an unfeminine way. After she gains control of the gun, she directs another nun to hand her a baby girl. We know the baby is a girl because she is dressed entirely in pink. Gemma could choose one of the adults in the room, such as the I.R.A. soldier or one of the nuns; she could also choose a male baby from the series of bassinets just to her right; instead, she removes a baby girl from the arms of a nun. The baby is removed from a feminine protective figure and placed in the control of Gemma, who at this moment is figured as an unholy Madonna, cradling a child but simultaneously threatening to shoot it. We view Gemma from a slightly lower angle that emphasizes her commanding stature and thus conveys her position of power. In threatening a baby with a handgun, Gemma demonstrates that she does not

have an instinct to protect and nurture in general; her reasoned response to the non-cooperation of those keeping her grandson from her is to seize control of the exchange and use violence to protect her grandson. She strategically wields instrumental aggression in ways that situate her as a protective female figure and as an outlaw hero. This combination of familial protection, outlawry, and instrumental aggression subverts the role of the outlaw hero by expanding it to include maternal protection, redefining that traditionally masculine power in a distinctly feminine way. Gemma's identification as a mother categorizes her as feminine—in other words, she is more than a figurative male—but at the same time, she undermines the traditionally masculine nature of heroism.

In Mary's case, while she is not biologically a mother during the first three seasons, the episodes follow an arc in which she learns to nurture her family relationships and care for her witnesses emotionally as well as physically. The 4th season of *In Plain Sight* unexpectedly centers on Mary's pregnancy. Because the actress, McCormack, became pregnant, the writers and producers had to accommodate this complication in the show. Interestingly, the series' producers chose to depict a woman both very visibly pregnant and still very engaged with her job as a US Marshal. In her analysis of *Fargo*'s (1996) Minnesota police chief, Marge Gunderson (Frances McDormand), Dole argues that the "image of a uniformed police officer holding a gun above her swollen belly complicates gendered categories" in ways that create a "potentially disturbing collision of gendered images, of mother and licensed killer, that a pregnant policewoman represents" (92). While Dole concludes that Marge's other feminine characteristics, such as her polite friendliness, diffuse the threat posed by this intersection of femininity and masculinity, Mary's character fully engages both images. Although the storyline of the season dictates that she be restricted from fieldwork after the first trimester, her heroic qualities prevent her from being satisfied with desk duty. She tells her boss, Stan: "Ah, yes, pregnant and desk-bound. Oh, the strides we've made in the workplace!" (4.13). As a tough and gritty protector of others, Mary is unable to stay behind to take cover when one of her witnesses comes under attack from hired assassins. She is more than simply a man in drag as she takes a shooter's stance, in high heels and a bulletproof vest emblazoned with "US Marshal," her pregnant belly fully visible. As one of the assassins takes aim at the witness, Mary coolly fires three times, killing the armed man. Her physical presence combined with her appropriation of masculine instrumental violence in the course of protecting someone undermines the naturalness of the male gendered hero. That she manages to both gestate a baby and shoot up the bad guys makes the viewer aware that they are not simply witnessing a female hero appropriating masculine behavior. Mary and Gemma are both wholly female in aspects that make it clear

In season 4, toward the end of her pregnancy, Mary rescues a baby. Picking up the newborn, whom she earlier in the same episode had helped bring into this world, she is rattled by the fragility of a baby.

they are women who take masculine heroic traits and incorporate them fully into a new gender norm.

Tough, aggressive, and heroic female figures have become more thoroughly developed and powerful since they first began to take the screen. Female heroes are more likely to survive the action, without the punishment of death for their gender transgression, and are more likely to emerge with their power intact than they were in previous decades. Positioning female characters as powerful heroic protectors is a usurpation of power that was once exclusively male and reveals the socially constructed nature of masculine heroism. Because they are characters who employ male and female traits, Mary's and Gemma's use of aggression is a subversive appropriation that widens the range of behaviors available to them as women.

Notes

1. Björkqvist is internationally recognized for his work on gender and aggression. See Björkqvist and Niemelä for further explanations of direct and indirect aggression.

2. See Björkqvist and Niemelä as well as Sechrist and White for further information on gender and aggression.

3. *Sons of Anarchy* completed its 4th season in December 2011 with a renewal for season 5. *In Plain Sight* will end in 2012 with the current season 5.

4. The term *old lady* is used to reference a woman who has entered into a monogamous relationship with a club member. Any such *old lady* enjoys an elevated status within the group.

5. A prospect is a prospective male member of the club.

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