

THE MOMMY MYTH:
PERFECT MOTHER OR MATERNAL MONSTER;
PRESS COVERAGE OF WOMEN WHO KILL THEIR CHILDREN

By
Kelleen Patricia Forlizzi

A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted to the
Department of Communication
of Boston College

December 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
DEDICATION.....	4
ABSTRACT.....	5
CHAPTER ONE	6
INTRODUCTION.....	6
CHAPTER TWO	8
HISTORICAL CONTEXT	8
<i>The “Mommy Myth”</i>	8
CHAPTER THREE	12
THE MEDIA’S REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERS	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Child Development and Education</i>	12
<i>Family Communication</i>	13
<i>Mothers in the Workplace</i>	14
<i>Mothers in Print</i>	15
<i>Mothers on the Screen</i>	18
<i>Unfit Mothers</i>	19
CHAPTER FOUR.....	25
ARTIFACT CHOICE.....	25
CHAPTER FIVE.....	26
METHODOLOGY	26
<i>Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm</i>	26
CHAPTER SIX.....	30
SUSAN SMITH	30
<i>The Needy Mother</i>	30
ANALYSIS OF THE PRESS COVERAGE OF SUSAN SMITH.....	35
<i>Susan as the “Evil Mother” Character</i>	35
<i>Susan as the Grieving Mother</i>	37
<i>The Narrative of the “Perfect Community”</i>	39
<i>Susan as the “Perfect Wife”</i>	41
<i>“Mother” vs. “Woman”</i>	43
CHAPTER SEVEN	46
DARLIE ROUTIER.....	46
<i>The Entitled Mother</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
ANALYSIS OF THE PRESS COVERAGE OF DARLIE ROUTIER.....	51

<i>Darlie as the Conceited, “Evil Mother Character”</i>	51
<i>Darin Routier as the “Perfect Father”</i>	54
<i>Darlie as the Grieving Mother</i>	55
<i>“Mother” vs. “Woman”</i>	57
CHAPTER EIGHT	60
ANDREA YATES	60
<i>The Damaged Mother</i>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
ANALYSIS OF THE PRESS COVERAGE OF ANDREA YATES	64
<i>Andrea as the “Perfect Mother”, Fallen From Grace</i>	64
<i>Andrea as the Mentally Incapacitated Mother</i>	65
<i>Andrea as a Victim of Postpartum Depression</i>	68
<i>The Narrative of the “Perfect Community”</i>	69
<i>Russell Yates as the “Perfect Husband”</i>	70
<i>“Mother” vs. “Woman”</i>	72
CHAPTER NINE	74
IMPLICATIONS	74
CONCLUSION	75
WORKS CITED	76

DEDICATION

To my Mom:

As close to “perfect” as it gets.

ABSTRACT

Society's adherence to the "mommy myth" penetrates the media's definition of motherhood and produces the narrative of the "perfect mother". Using Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm, this paper examines the American press coverage of three mothers accused of murdering their children: Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, and Andrea Yates. The American press portrayed the narratives of these three mothers as the antithesis of "perfect", depicting each woman as an unnatural, "evil mother" character. This depiction allowed the print media to reconcile the dominant maternal model of the "perfect mother" with the narratives of these "maternal monsters".

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

While the work of mothers is often overlooked, the importance of a mother-figure in the life of a child is rarely underestimated. The role of a mother not only includes the responsibility of carrying and birthing a child, but also offering this child all of life's necessities, including a safe, stable home, adequate education, and unconditional love and support. In the eyes of society, these duties are not optional for a mother, but rather mandatory requirements for any woman worthy of the title of "perfect mother". Women today face enormous pressure to earn this title, as evidenced by the soaring popularity of child-care experts, child rearing books, and extensive preschool applications. Criticism towards working mothers and the evolution of the term "latch key kids" exemplify obstacles many women strive to overcome on their quest for "perfect mother" status.

The media has always been instrumental in shaping this definition of the "perfect mom", exemplified in the 1950's with "Leave it to Beaver's" June Cleaver and perpetuated today with the intense media focus on new celebrity mothers like Katie Holms and her daughter, Suri Cruise. Magazines like *People*, *US Weekly*, and *Cosmopolitan* use this pregnant celebrity culture to reinforce the new mantra, "motherhood is sexy" (Douglas 331). Also depicted in such magazines, as well as in many other mainstream media outlets, is the figure of the inadequate, or "evil mother". This "evil mother" character penetrates society's consciousness with images ranging from Britney Spears driving her convertible with her little baby boy, Sean Preston, in her lap, to mothers like Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, or Andrea Yates, standing in an orange jumpsuit and handcuffs, on trial for the murders of their children.

The media coverage of inadequate, unnatural, and “evil mothers” such as Smith, Routier, and Yates serves to warn women everywhere of the consequences of breaking the “perfect mother” stereotype. While in reality, most mothers live in the “gray area in between” the “perfect mother” and these three murderous maternal figures, the media only provides the dueling narratives of “perfect” and “evil” mothers (Swigart 2). The act of filicide, a parent murdering his or her own child or children, captures society’s attention as a shocking, horrifying occurrence, resulting in the media frenzy surrounding cases such as the murder trials of Smith, Routier, and Yates. Women who harm their children are portrayed as “the antithesis of feminine”, and “society is often torn as to whether infanticide is a manifestation of illness or a manifestation of evil” (“Perfect Mother 11). In examining society’s definition and representation of the mother figure, this paper situates the narratives of Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, and Andrea Yates within this dichotomy of illness versus evil and perfection versus malevolence.

This paper examines the evolution of the “mommy myth” through society’s definition of the “perfect mother”, as well as the media’s depictions of these “perfect” and “evil” mother figures. Within the context of this dominant maternal model, I will use Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm to analyze the American press coverage of three mothers accused of murdering their children: Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, and Andrea Yates.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The “Mommy Myth”

Different in each society, the idea of motherhood is culturally derived, shaped by each culture’s “myths, rituals, beliefs, expectations, norms, and symbols” (Thurer XV). In her book The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother, Shari Thurer examines this “man-made ideology of good mothering” dominant in our society today, which teaches women, among other things, that motherhood is the best and most important aspect of their lives (XXV). No woman can ever be complete or fulfilled unless she bears and raises children (Douglas 4); for a married woman, pregnancy and mothering is seen as a “moral requirement” (Bassin 39). In The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels explain, motherhood not only establishes a woman’s femininity, but also defines her very existence, more so than her profession, personality, or physical appearance (22). The differences in the definitions of the verbs to “father” and to “mother” epitomize the idea of motherhood as a cultural creation. In Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers, Julia Penelope details, while “the verb ‘father’ denotes the act of fertilization, implying no responsibility toward a child....the verb ‘mother’” not only signifies the action of giving birth, but also loving, protecting, and nurturing the offspring (188).

The act of mothering a child, in each and every sense of the word, is “simultaneously idealized and devalued by being considered merely natural and so taken for granted”, writes Donna Bassin in her scholarship Representations of Motherhood

(147). Not valued by society as a form of work or “thoughtful project” requiring both time and effort, “mothering is said to be love and feminine duty” (Bassin 29). Women receive no credit for their role in the creation, reproduction, and labor of a child; this work is seen as natural, and in viewing it as so, society takes away both recognition and power from women as individuals involved in the creation of a life (Bassin 201). Every woman is viewed as a potential mother; this mother-in-waiting already naturally possesses the qualities of a good mother within. Even if these maternal characteristics remain hidden deep inside of a woman, they will surface as soon she is with child. For women, explains Jane Swigart in The Myth of the Bad Mother: The Emotional Realities of Mothering, “nurturing comes as naturally as breathing, and child rearing is a source of pleasure that does not require discipline or self-sacrifice” (6).

This widely held belief that mothering is purely instinctual explains our society’s lack of education for new mothers. We would laugh at the idea of a class teaching such a woman “how to be a mother”, and would think her naïve, or worse, incompetent, for asking what the job of motherhood entails (Swigart 193). It is not acceptable for women to question what it means to be a mother; there is no room for uncertainty or hesitation in mothering. Not instinctively knowing how to raise a child makes a woman less of a mother and less of a female (Swigart 40). A female lacking such knowledge of her newborn’s care would certainly be labeled with society’s greatest insult for a woman: a “bad mom”.

Our society subscribes to the myth that mothers must fall into one of two categories: the “good mother” or the “bad mother”. New and veteran mommies alike desperately cling to the hope that they land somewhere closer to the definition of the

former, rather than the latter. The “bad mother” possesses strictly masculine traits; she is easily bored with her offspring, self-absorbed, and “damages her children without even knowing it” (Swigart 6). It follows, then, that “ambition is not a maternal trait; motherhood and ambition are largely seen as opposing forces”, hence our society’s prevailing negative stereotype of the working mother (Thurer 287). The “bad mother” is also “responsible for her children’s emotional problems and unhappiness” (Swigart 6); how her child turns out is the final judgment of a mother’s life (Thurer XIII). Society continues to collectively point the finger at the “bad mother” as a scapegoat for other problems including any rise in substance abuse and crime among youths.

The counterpart to this inclination for blaming mothers can be seen in society’s historical idolization of the “good mother”, or “perfect mother” figure (Swigart 8). “The mother-child relationship is often romanticized, as though the love a mother feels for her baby is a spiritual, ethereal emotion” (Swigart 42) This image of the “good mother” is timeless, dating back to the biblical era and the representation of Mary cradling her baby Jesus. Like Mary, the “good mother” must be “always loving, selfless, tranquil; the one who finds passionate fulfillment in every detail of child rearing” (Thurer XIII); she is “selflessly devoted to her children’s well being” (Swigart 6). Motherhood, in its purest and most righteous form, equals unconditional love (Bassin 201). For the “good mother”, “good enough” means “bad”, and mediocrity is unacceptable. The only choice and socially acceptable status for this mother is “perfect”. Cultural norms reject the possibility for a “good” mother to be ambivalent, never mind hateful or resentful, towards her child. “Good”, or even “ordinary”, mothers don’t resent their children for any reason, not even for all the sacrifices made in their name (Bassin 152). Unlike “good fathers”, no

woman is considered a “good mother” simply because she carries out her responsibility as a parent; it would be a “social crime”, rather, for her not to do so (Swigart 191). For men, the label “good father” is contingent on monetary support and the occasional weekend visit. When “nurturing acts are preformed by men, they are seen as extraordinary” (Thurer 287).

CHAPTER THREE

THE MEDIA'S REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHERS

Child Development and Education

The majority of scholarship describing parenting in general, and mothers in particular, arises not from a communication standpoint, but rather from the fields of child development and education. Many studies, such as Plessow-Wolfson and Epstein's "The Experience of Story Reading: Deaf Children and Hearing Mothers' Interactions at Story Time", as well as Adrian, Clemente, Villanueva, and Rieffe's "Parent-Child Picture-Book Reading, Mothers' Mental State Language and Children's Theory of Mind", focus on the physiological and psychological effects of a mother's interactions with her child. More specifically, both Keown, Woodward, and Field's article, "Language Development of Pre-School Children Born to Teenage Mothers", and Skibbe, Behnke, and Justice's piece, "Parental Scaffolding in Children's Phonological Awareness Skills: Interactions Between Mothers and Their Preschoolers with Language Difficulties", center on a mother's ability to shape, and possibly hinder, her child's language development in the formative years. Row, Pan, and Coker's study "A Comparison of Fathers' and Mothers' Talk to Toddlers in Low-Income Families" also fits into this category. Eleni Petraki's article, "Disagreement and Opposition in Multigenerational Interviews with Greek-Australian Mothers and Daughters", as well as Pluhar and Kuriloff's "What Really Matters in Family Communication About Sexuality? A Qualitative Analysis of Affect and Style Among African American Mothers and Adolescent Daughters", also belong in this field of family communication, as both discuss the role and importance of a mother's

use of language in terms of the welfare and successful mental and physical development of their offspring.

Family Communication

The study of mothers from the communication perspective ranges from literature describing a mother's role in family communication, to the role of a mother as the sole parent of her child. In his study of sixty-four single mothers, entitled "Rhetorical Vision of Unmarried Mothers", Thomas G. Endres employs Bormann's fantasy theme to analyze the rhetoric produced both by and about unmarried mothers. Using "a humanistic dramatic analysis of the messages made available to unmarried mothers through their rhetorical communities", Endres identifies three shared storylines, or rhetorical visions, between each of these women: the "Down and Out Vision", the "Making the Best Vision", and the "Y.U.M.M.I.E Vision" (135). Endres describes the "Down and Out" mother as young and accidentally pregnant. Her pregnancy "is a bad situation, and the mother in this vision doesn't see any way out or up"; she is a victim without a future (Endres 139). While also young and accidentally with child, the "Making the Best" unmarried mother "is striving to make the best of a bad situation" with the love and support of her family and friends (Endres 140). She is moving forward in life and, while recognizing the social stigma that accompanies single motherhood, she has "learned to brush it off" (Endres 140). The last vision, that of the "Young, Upwardly Mobile Mother", or Y.U.M.M.I.E mother, involves a young, well-educated, financially stable mother; "Her decision to have a child out of wedlock was a conscious one....Any social stigmatization is viewed as outdated" (Endres 141).

Mothers in the Workplace

Much scholarship describing the representation of mothers, both single and married, falls into the realm of work-family literature, from educational, psychological, and also communication standpoints. For example, in her article “Ideological Undercurrents in the Semantic Notion of ‘Working Mother’”, Fern L. Johnson explores the construction of the term “working mother” from linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural perspectives, arguing while this term may appear both liberating and progressive due to the circumstances which it describes, the semantic notion of “working mother” in fact “perpetuates sexism, classism, and racism” (21). This term pits the definition of “working” in opposition to the definition of “mothering”, supporting the conclusion “that mothering as a primary activity is NOT work” (Johnson 21). “To be working is to be doing wage earning activity, but not domestic activity” (Johnson 23), subordinating women’s role in the workplace to that of her duties as a mother. The idea of a “working mother” assumes “working” in a wage-earning capacity is in fact an option for each individual mother, rather than an absolute necessity (Johnson 24). The absence of the male counterpart to “working mother”, “working father”, from the vernacular of society cements the notion of parenting as a female domain and the world of wage-earning work as a male domain. The term “working father” appears not only comical, but redundant, as well.

Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Liu, Bowers, and Conn’s study of eleven women holding managerial positions, entitled “The Good *Working* Mother: Managerial Women’s Sensemaking and Feelings About Work-Family Issues”, also focuses on the idea of mothering in the workplace, employing a “sensemaking lens” to explore the self-

image of these working mothers following their return to the office after maternity leaves (261). This article describes each participants reframing of society's typically accepted "good mother" image into that of a "good working mother" image. To complete this role of the "good working mother", each participant attests to possessing the three characteristics they believe are necessary to achieve this label: "good working mothers arrange quality childcare; good working mother are equal partners [with their husbands and/or their baby's father]; good working mothers feel pleasure in their working mother role" (Buzzanell 261). This reframing allows these professional women to account for the disjoint in society's negative view towards working mothers, and more specifically towards working mothers of infant children, and the lives each of these women lead. In attaining these three characteristics, the female participants allow themselves not only to feel equal to stay at home moms, but above stay at home moms; the addition of employment to their life separates them as "superior to stay at home mothers in that [the] participants feel they have the best of both worlds and are better moms because of their work" (Buzzanell 277). Similar to Johnson's research, "these women feel the need to justify their decision to work" while "working fathers", so to speak, do not (Buzzanell 277).

Mothers in Print

Although countless communication studies focus on the representation of women in the media, whether in television, film, advertisements, or print, there is little research on the depictions of these women as mothers in any of these mediums. The medium with the most research specifically addressing the portrayal of mothers is that of magazines, and more specifically, parenting magazines, in particular. In their article "Undermining

Mothers: A Content Analysis of the Representation of Mothers in Magazines”, Deirdre D. Johnston and Debra H. Swanson combine the fields of the study of working mothers as well as the study of mothers’ depictions in magazines by describing what they call “mothering wars – the pitting of at-home and employed mothers against each other” through the use of rhetoric in the popular women’s magazines *Good Housekeeping*, *Family Circle*, *Parents’ Magazine*, *Family Fun*, and *Working Mother* (243). Johnston and Swanson describe the four “maternal contradictions” found in these publications: mothers as selfish/selfless; mothers as nurturers of dependence/independence; mothers as successes/failures in the domestic/public spheres; mothers as intuitive/in need of expert help (Johnston 245). These magazines also perpetuate the socially accepted notion that the identities of the professional woman and the perfect mother are mutually exclusive (Johnston 244).

The good mother is constructed as selfless, interdependent with children, naturally endowed for nurturing and successful in the domestic sphere. The good professional is constructed as promoting self, demonstrating independence, lacking in natural mothering qualities, and fulfilling her potential in the domestic sphere (Johnston 245).

These contradictory messages “have implications on the empowerment of mothers and the perpetuation of patriarchal systems” (Johnston 243).

In addition to Johnston’s work, Jane Sutherland’s article, “‘Parenting’ or ‘Mothering’? The Case of Modern Childcare Magazines”, also analyzes the content of such parenting magazines. Sutherland notes, while in recent years the titles of many of these magazines have adapted to “some variation of ‘parent’ rather than ‘mother’” to reflect society’s supposed changing attitudes regarding parenting, as well as appeal to a new demographic of male readers, the content of these magazines still does not, in fact,

fully address fathers nor promote “shared parenting or hands-on fathering” (503). Rather, these magazines contain “visuals, voices, gendered stereotypes and gendered discourses” addressing only the female parent or primary caregiver (Sutherland 503).

Catherine Dobris and Kim White-Mills also analyze the depictions of mothers in another form of print media, that of books, in their article, “Rhetorical Visions of Motherhood: A Feminist Analysis of the *What to Expect* Series”. Examining the representations of mothers in three books from this popular series entitled *What to Expect When You’re Expecting*, *What to Expect: The First Year*, and *What to Expect: The Toddler Years*, Dobris and White-Mills observe the “fantasy vision” of motherhood in each of these pieces of literature (26). Utilizing Bormann’s fantasy theme to “illuminate themes implicit in the construction of ‘motherhood’ by authors Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi Murkoff, and Sandee Hathaway”, Dobris and White-Mills describe the evolution of “childcare manuals” from a feminist perspective (26). This study found each book explicitly addresses the reader, “you”, as female, “despite the gender-neutral language on the book covers”, reinforcing society’s equation of “parent” to “mother” (Dobris 31). This particular idea of a mother also assumes the woman in question is “middle income, heterosexual, married, educated, in her mid-twenties to early thirties, career oriented, and well insured” (Dobris 31). Dobris and White-Mills also note the *What to Expect* series presupposes all women are natural caregivers, possessing the trait of women’s intuition. The authors of the *What to Expect* books reinforce the commonly held belief that even a mother “with no background or experience in child bearing or rearing will somehow sense what is right or wrong” for her own child, as if a baby is always a natural extension of its mother (Dobris 32).

Mothers on the Screen

While the communication scholarship regarding the representation of mothers in the media is certainly limited in both depth and breath, several pieces do describe various aspects of this issue. Sonia Livingstone and Tamar Liebes' article, "Where Have All the Mothers Gone? Soap Opera's Replaying of the Oedipal Story", for example, analyzes the depictions of mother characters through the medium of television shows, and more specifically the television soap opera, *The Young and the Restless*. Livingstone and Liebes conduct a "detailed analysis of a recurrent narrative element in soaps – that of the 'bad' and/or missing mother of young women heroines, in contrast with the mothering of sons" (155). Noting the frequency of this nonexistent relationship between mother and daughter in comparison to the ever present narrative of the supporting, loving, and involved mother and her son, Livingstone and Liebes argue "the absent mother story" reinforces "hegemonic popular culture...which socializes women to their dependency to men" (161). This article concludes that *The Young and the Restless*' negative representation of the mothers of female characters serves to repress women as both strong, independent individuals and mothers, as well (Livingstone 155).

Elaine Roth's scholarship, "Momophobia: Incapacitated Mothers and Their Adult Children in 1990's Film", also focuses on the representation of mothers on the (albeit larger) screen, analyzing the character types of mothers in major motion pictures produced during the 1990's. Several films which debuted during this decade share one particular character type: the "institutionalized, incapacitated mother of adult children" (Roth 189). Roth believes films such as *The Net*, *Sleeping with the Enemy*, *American Beauty* and *Grosse Pointe Blank* "reveal cultural anxiety and phobia about aging but

empowered women, rendering them as marginal, pathetic figures” (189). Roth concludes this mentally vacant mother figure “registers the ambivalent and contradictory understanding of motherhood” and forces these films to acknowledge “the complicated nature of the institution of motherhood...and power of the mother” (202).

Christina R. Foust’s contribution to the discussion of the media’s portrayal of mothers, her article “A Return to Feminine Public Virtue: Judge Judy and the Myth of the Tough Mother”, focuses on the success the image of the archetypal “Tough Mother” has brought Judge Judy Sheindlin through her hit television show “Judge Judy”. Foust argues Judge Judy’s “persona...rests on the traditional feminine roles of mother and wife” (271). “Judge Judy uses personal, often domestic experiences to justify decisions; she uses virtue language...and she offers practical advice that is also nurturing” (Foust 283). Foust argues the public’s acceptance of such a tough, outspoken, female figure of authority, as evidence by the longevity and popularity of Judge Judy’s program, stems from her maternal image and “domestic virtues...which justify her entry into gendered public spaces”, such as the traditionally male dominated world of the courtroom (Foust 270). Further stressing the importance of the media’s portrayal of women in power as maternal, Foust compares the widespread acceptance of Judge Judy to the rejection of another “aggressive public woman”, Hillary Rodham Clinton (270). Clinton’s inability to embody the public persona of “mother” in the media results in the press’ portrayal of her as “unconventionally female” and open to “public attack” (Foust 284).

Unfit Mothers

Marian Meyers’s article, “Crack Mothers in the News: A Narrative of Paternalistic Racism”, fits into the genre of communication scholarship, examining the

print media's representations of mothers, or more specifically in terms of this piece, the media's portrayal of mothers addicted to crack cocaine. Using a narrative analysis of various newspaper articles, Meyers "explores the major themes and character types" in the story of the "crack mother" (194). Meyers identifies the main character of this narrative as the sexual, African American "she-devil crack mother" (194). This character "threatens the lives and safety of her born and unborn children and is responsible for an epidemic of crack babies as well as the poverty of values crippling the inner city" (Meyers 194). Meyers also notes female crack cocaine users "meet with harsher social disapproval than do male users because drug use is seen as incompatible with being a woman", and exceptionally incompatible with being a mother (196). The female crack addict's role as a mother plays an integral part in her rehabilitation story. In each of these newspaper narratives, "the mothers have no intrinsic value [as women]; drug rehabilitation is the means to get them off drugs so they can properly raise their children" (Meyers 210). Again, the female's most important role in life is that of a mother, before all else; she must not get clean and healthy to save herself, but rather to save her children.

Also tackling the issue of the media's role in depicting mothers perceived to have some sort of physical or mental instability or incapacitation, Marlene Cimon's 2006 article "Menopause: Milestone or Misery? A Look at Media Messages to Our Mothers and Grandmothers" describes the media's changing representation of women's health issues and of mothers and grandmothers suffering from another perceived "mental illness", menopause (63). Cimon examines the messages about menopause and middle age conveyed by *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, and *The Washington Post* in articles published over the past six decades. Cimon details the

evolution of representations of menopause as a transition from a dark, secretive “mental illness” (63), to simple “female troubles” (68), to a “physiological crisis” (63), and finally to a “medically treatable condition...a deficiency disease...attributed to estrogen deficiency” (67). This change in attitude is attributed to the growing media attention given to the issue due to the trend of new magazines, newspaper columns and advertisements directed specifically at the market of women, and later to “direct advertising to patients and television promotion of drugs” (Cimons 88).

This evolution of society’s attitude towards menopause, as well as the medical community’s study of this condition and subsequent understanding of menopause and its causes and cures, stands in stark opposition to the attitudes about, and study of, another female health concern, that of Postpartum Depression (P.P.D.). The scholarship of Barbara Barnett in her article “Perfect Mother or Artist of Obscenity? Narrative and Myth in a Qualitative Analysis of Press Coverage of the Andrea Yates Murders”, while not dealing specifically with Postpartum Depression, studies of the media’s depiction of Yates after she drowned her five children. Barnett notes the media fails to discuss the lack of resources for, and study of, women’s health, specifically women who suffer from Postpartum Depression, never questioning why no medication exists to treat this female phenomenon (“Perfect Mother” 23).

Barnett’s focus, however, is not on the media’s representation of P.P.D., but rather a narrative analysis of the press coverage of Yates’ murder trial, revealing two distinct storylines: “the story of the traitor, used to appropriate blame, and the story of the quest, constructed to right a wrong” (9). In the media, Yates became a “Judas Iscariot figure, who, motivated by evil and selfishness, betrayed the innocent” through the

betrayal of her husband, her children, her sex, and her role as a mother (“Perfect Mother” 15). Barnett also notes, “The news stories did not reflect the quest to find adequate healthcare for Yates. Instead the quest was for legal remedy and punishment” (15).

Describing society’s notions of the “mother” and the “maternal”, Barnett reaches the conclusion that the community cannot bridge the disconnect between the idea of a “mother” and a “murderer” as one. Women create life and thus should be unable to demolish it (“Perfect Mother” 24).

Women in general and mothers, in particular, are supposed to protect their families, but Yates destroyed hers, and news articles sought to reconcile the differences between the expected and the actual. It was this disjuncture that propelled the Yates murders onto the front pages of national newspapers. The Yates murders became the what-a-story because Yates’ actions violated cultural stereotypes of women as always loving and caring, as well as societal expectations that mothers are inherently competent in care-taking tasks (“Perfect Mother” 10).

Barnett’s latest article, her 2006 study entitled “Medea in the Media: Narrative and Myth in Newspaper Coverage of Women Who Kill Their Children”, expands her study of Yates’ narrative in the American media to include a content analysis of the media’s portrayal of ten mothers who murdered their infants from 1990 to 2002. Barnett found two prevailing narratives in the news coverage of these women: the narrative of the “superior nurturer driven to insanity and mental illness because she cared so much” and the narrative of “the inferior caretaker who shirked her maternal duty because she cared so little” (411). These media stories only depict two types of mothers: the “good mother”, the “consummate nurturer”, willing to sacrifice all for the welfare of her family, and the “bad mother”, the “consummate destroyer” (“Medea” 412), selfish, evil, callous, and deceptive (“Medea” 416), not to mention, “sexually promiscuous, non-remorseful, and even non-feminine” (“Medea” 418). This murdering mother, who “cared too much”,

however, was not depicted in the media as “bad” (“Medea” 417). This mother was simply a “good mother” gone “mad”; she was “morally pure and conformed to traditional gender roles and notions of femininity”, yet in the end, succumbed to mental illness and was not responsible for her actions (“Medea” 417).

In this article, Barnett attempts to situate infanticide within “the broader context of gender inequality” and social injustice, analyzing the “disparities in punishments for women convicted of murdering their children” (411). This author believes the overarching “myth of the all-knowing, all-loving, and all-powerful mother” obscures the true causes of maternal violence, including, but not limited to, postpartum depression, economic stress, and substance abuse (“Medea” 411). The media’s attempts to “cast mothers who kill their children as insane or evil was a narrative device that helped journalists simplify their stories” (“Medea” 425).

Barnett’s “Medea in the Media: Narrative and Myth in Newspaper Coverage of Women Who Kill Their Children”, which includes references to both Susan Smith and Andrea Yates, is certainly the closest communication scholarship to that of my own. Yet Barnett’s piece, an overview of ten females, lacks an in-depth study of any of these women and self-admittedly does “not explore [the] meaning” of any of these media representations: “Because content analysis examines frequencies but does not explore meaning, the primary focus of this study was a qualitative textual analysis of news articles” (“Medea” 416). Barnett’s study focuses instead on the frequency of words such as “shocking”, “horrible”, “mysterious”, “tragic”, “rare” and “preventable” in these articles featured in mainstream American newspapers (“Medea” 416).

Through the images of mothers in commercials and advertisements for everything from Pampers to Nestle Tollhouse Cookies, as well as in films, television shows, and print, the mass media perpetuates the myth of the “perfect mother”, teaching women that however much you love your children, it is still not enough. The study of mothers from the educational, psychological, and communication perspectives each contain elements of the “perfect mother” narrative. This scholarship will examine the American press coverage of three mothers who murdered their children, revealing the components of the narrative of the “perfect” or “evil” mother. The narratives created by the press for each of these three women, Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, and Andrea Yates, contain similar storylines, as well as matching definitions of both motherhood and mothers.

CHAPTER FOUR

ARTIFACT CHOICE

This scholarship analyzes print media in general and American newspaper articles in particular focusing on the press' depictions of Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, and Andrea Yates to examine the press' use of the "perfect mother" narrative in the coverage of each of these women. A LexisNexis Academic search for articles containing the key terms of each woman's first and last names from major American newspapers produced the one-hundred and thirty-one articles studied in this scholarship. Fifty-one articles describe the Susan Smith case, twenty-eight detail Darlie Routier's arrest and subsequent trial, and fifty-two articles contain discussions of Andrea Yates. Susan Smith's articles were published from October 25, 1994 – October 15, 2006, Darlie Routier from June 6, 1996 – October 17, 2006, and Andrea Yates from June 20, 2001 – October 1, 2006. I reviewed these articles for a period of two weeks, from October 28, 2006 – November 11, 2006.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

Fisher's Narrative Paradigm

The narrative paradigm methodology was first developed in 1984 by Walter Fisher and outlined in his article “Narrative as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument”. Fisher contends that human beings are natural storytellers, or “homo narrans”; they use stories to illustrate experiences, beliefs, and values (2). These stories evolve from several different sources, including personal experiences, imagination, the experiences of family members, and cultural scripts; stories are how people make sense of their lives (Kelly 303). Fisher defines the narrative paradigm as “a theory of symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (2). The narrative paradigm is a “legitimate and useful way to interpret and understand human relations” (Fisher 350).

A typical narrative contains an overarching theme expressed by the creator of the story. This theme flows consistently through the narrative and is easily relatable to the audience (Fisher 8). This main story line usually contains one major metaphor that also reflects the narrative’s key overarching theme. This all-inclusive theme ties together all aspects of the story; its pervasiveness gives rise to a highly persuasive message (Mehlretter 6).

The audience is also a vital part of a narrative message. Narrative, or narrative rationality, as Fisher defines it, must feel personal to the audience. Narrative reframes the situation and context of a story to make it coherent with the community’s, or audience’s, beliefs and values (Fisher 58). Persuasive narratives “express a knowledge

that is shared by the community” (Lewis 292). Each story must fit a culturally defined set of rules and expectations for it to be completely embraced and understood by the audience.

Narratives are very convincing in every context because stories are the universal way for humans to make sense of their lives. Using a narrative allows the creator of the message to build a relationship with a broad audience. Fisher believes that both the authors of the message and the audience members participate in the making of these messages. Stories give the teller and the listener a way to understand each other’s experiences and form a bond through the shared elements in both their lives (Fisher 58). The narrative provides a logical explanation that listeners can compare to their own life experiences to “satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity” (Fisher 58).

Narrative probability and narrative fidelity are two aspects used to assess the effectiveness of a story (Fisher 348). A narrative must not only make sense, but also be consistent and follow the “logic of good reasons” (Fisher 349). Humans are as much “rhetorical beings” as they are “reasoning animals” (Fisher 376). Incorporating logic with emotion, and the real with the imagined, stories allow people to organize and explain. And while narratives stories have elements of both truth and fiction, they are still perceived as reality (Fisher 380). A key component of human communication is the use of symbols, however irrational (Lewis 288). In order to be believable, the stories must parallel those the audience knows to be true in their own lives, even if it involves the story containing false information or exaggeration (Fisher 4). Fisher believes “people’s symbolic actions take the form of stories and that they assess them by the

principles of coherence and fidelity” (Fisher 19). Fisher concedes, however, that “no guarantee exists that one who uses narrative will not adopt ‘bad’ stories, rationalization” (Fisher 349). The newspaper coverage of Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, and Andrea Yates all contain the overarching theme of the “perfect mother”/“evil mother” narrative. The articles analyzed in this research each describe these three women in contrast to the “perfect mother” model, emphasizing their fall into the “evil mother” category and eventually stripping Smith, Routier, and Yates of their titles of “mother”.

The mass media continues to perpetuate society’s narrow definitions of “mother” through its depiction of these women in major American newspapers. These portrayals reinforce societal norms regarding mothers and motherhood: in order to be considered a “good mother”, a woman must possess each and every quality of the “perfect mother” character contained in the mommy myth. This character of the “perfect mother” is maternal in every sense of the word: patient, nurturing, sympathetic, kind, and gentle. She is completely devoted to her children, always places the well-being of her offspring above her own, and loves her babies unconditionally through every stage of their life. This mother holds small town, traditional values, and possesses the responsibility of being the sole childcare provider for her kids. She alone, without the help of a spouse or significant other, must protect her children. Rather than see her children face harm or hardship, the “perfect mother” will suffer immense pain, even in the form of torture or death; dying is less painful for this woman than the mere thought of losing her child.

In her narrative, the “perfect mother” is also chaste and loyal to her husband. She tends to her spouse and her household without ever neglecting her number one priority, the children, and still always manages to appear put-together and good-looking in

accordance with society's standards of beauty and fashion. She wears a touch of make-up, ironed, matching outfits, and tasteful jewelry. The "perfect mother" is embraced by her "perfect community", and contributes to her town, city, or country, through her religious organization or her children's schools. She helps friends, neighbors, and strangers alike in times of need, loving others as if they were of her own family. Naturally possessing all of these traits, such "perfect mothers" exude love and warmth, not only in the presence of their own children, but around all little ones in general. In turn, her community helps the "perfect mother" raise and protect her children, providing a suitable environment of love and support for both mother and child alike.

Should a mother lack one or more of the characteristics of the "perfect mom", she is automatically labeled a "bad mother"; it is impossible to be a "mediocre" or simply "suitable mother". Each mother must fit within one of two categories: "perfect" or "evil". Society equates a mother who places her own needs or desires above those of her children with a mother who starves or otherwise abandons her babies. This dichotomy of the "perfect mother" narrative versus the "evil mother" narrative is found in American newspapers' portrayals of the narratives of three mothers accused of murdering their children. The narratives of Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, and Andrea Yates depict the fall of the "perfect mother" and describe each woman in an unsympathetic, unnatural light. Each of these women represents the antithesis of the "perfect mother" and possesses characteristics opposite of this consummate maternal figure, perfectly aligning their narratives with the "evil mother" story.

CHAPTER SIX

Even before the murders of their children, Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, and Andrea Yates all shared similar backgrounds. Each of these suburban moms grew up and resided in small, southern towns with strong religious ties and conservative values; these stay-at-home mothers raised their babies with little help or support from husbands who believed in traditional marriages and subscribed to conventional gender roles. Smith, Routier, and Yates, however, would never have been skyrocketed to their status as infamous had it not been for their crimes against their offspring.

SUSAN SMITH

The Needy Mother

Susan Leigh Vaughan was born and raised in Union, South Carolina, a small, “close-knit, God-fearing community” (Grant). This rural town, with a population of approximately 10,000, boasts “more than fifty churches and only one bar” (Grant). Susan’s childhood, however, was anything but typical in this small town; her father committed suicide when she was only six years old and she was repeatedly molested by her stepfather as a young teen. These traumatic events may have contributed to her two suicide attempts as a teenager, as well as her short stay in a psychiatric facility (Finkel W10). After high school, Susan began working at a local convenience store, and developed a relationship with the store’s manager, Alex Smith. Two months pregnant with their first child, Susan Vaughan married Alex Smith in March of 1991, at the young ages of nineteen and twenty, respectively. By 1994, the couple’s family consisted of two little boys, Michael, three years old, and Alex, fourteen months. This family, however, quickly dissolved, as questions of fidelity arose on both sides. After Alex moved out,

Susan began dating Union's "most eligible bachelor", Tom Findlay, the son of the owner of a large South Carolina textile manufacturing company, where Susan worked as a secretary (Haines 22). Findlay, however, broke off the affair with Susan, citing her two little boys as his reason for the sudden split: he did not want to care for another man's children (Haines 22).

The day after her official break-up with Findlay, October 25, 1994, Smith fed her little boys pizza for dinner, bundled them up in their winter jackets and hats, and loaded them into her sedan. As her confession would later reveal, at approximately nine p.m., Smith drove her burgundy Mazda to the edge of the John D. Long Lake, and parked it on a steep incline. She intended to end her own life, along with the lives of her children; in the end, Smith told authorities she changed her mind and decided to save herself. With both boys asleep in the back, strapped into their safety seats, Smith released the emergency break, shut her driver's side door, and let the car roll into the icy water, with her two helpless children still inside ("Smith's Defense" A8).

Screaming hysterically, Smith ran down the street, away from the lake. An elderly couple emerged from their house to help Smith, as she frantically shouted, "Please! Help! He's got my kids and he's got my car!" ("An Agonizing Search" A22). When authorities arrived, Smith informed police that a black man had jumped into the passenger seat of her car, through the unlocked door, pointed a gun at her head, and ordered her to get out, when she stopped at a nearby red light. This man allegedly screamed, "Get out of the car or I'll kill you!" ("An Agonizing Search" A22). As the carjacker drove away with her babies sleeping in the backseat, Smith screamed, "I love you all!" to Michael and Alex ("An Agonizing Search" A22). Smith told the police she

did not know her attacker, but he seemed out of breath, as if he had been running before he approached her car (“An Agonizing Search” A22).

Police immediately released a composite sketch of a black man, in his twenties or thirties, five foot nine inches to six feet tall, wearing a dark blue ski cap, blue jeans, and a blue jacket; thousands of copies of this sketch were passed out in neighboring communities, and plastered on television stations and newspapers across the nation for the next nine days (“An Agonizing Search” A22). The hunt for the kidnapped Smith children began, launching this scared, small town into the national spotlight (Haines 22). Thousands of volunteers “combed back roads, dredged lakes, passed out flyers...and prayed for the safety of [Smith’s] sons”, all the while wearing yellow ribbons as a show of faith and support (“Police Say Woman” A1). The FBI scoured the country hoping to erase the status of the Smith family as a “national symbol of every parent’s worst nightmare” (“Another Day of Pain” A1).

Despite strong public support for Susan Smith, police considered the mother their prime suspect within twenty-four hours of her 9-1-1 call. Right away, holes appeared in Smith’s story. Smith told police she was stopped at a red light and no other cars were in the vicinity at the time of the carjacking. This particular light, however, is permanently green, and does not turn red unless another car approaches the intersection (“Public Suspicion Focuses” A10). Susan also wavered on her intended destination that fateful night. At first, she claimed she had been shopping at Wal-Mart with her children and decided to visit the fiancé of her best girlfriend. Neither consumers nor employees of the store, however, remembered seeing her and this fiancé confessed he was not expecting Smith as a visitor. To counter these inconsistencies, Susan asserted that she was simply

driving around aimlessly, but feared telling the truth would cast suspicion in her direction. The police were also suspicious of the lack of evidence in this week old crime. It is very rare in such a hijacking case that the car in question does not turn up within the first forty-eight hours. Police also questioned the lack of witnesses and the carjacker's motive to keep the children (Haines 22). And if the carjacker had in fact released or harmed the children, where did he dispose of their bodies?

On the ninth day, November 3, 1994, "after the alleged abduction, Susan appeared on all three major television networks," pleading for her children's safe return and asserting her innocence in the disappearance of her babies (Haines 22). Later that very same day, Union County Sheriff Howard Wells called Smith back into the police station for questioning, informing her about the workings of the streetlight and asking her how her story could possibly be true in light of this new discovery. Smith began to pray, and Wells asked the "Lord to give us guidance...for all things will be revealed in time" ("Smith's Defense" A8). He then told the sobbing mother, "Susan, it's time" ("Smith's Defense" A8). Smith fell to her knees and confessed. Later that night, authorities found the bodies of Michael and Alex, still strapped into their car seats, at the bottom of John D. Long Lake, thirty meters out and six meters deep ("Police Say Woman Admits" A1).

At Smith's trial, witnesses painted a confounding picture of the extremely different personalities of Susan Smith: "a vixenish adulteress, a lovesick secretary, an abused child, a frightened wife, a skillful liar, and a doting mother" ("Former Lover" A3). Smith's team of defense claimed she was mentally unstable due to her history of abuse at the hands of her stepfather as a teenager. A "deeply tormented" woman, Smith simply "snapped"; drowning her children was not a "conscious decision" ("Smith's

Defense” A8). The prosecution, however, asserted Smith was in a panic because her husband had discovered Smith had began an affair with this same step-father, Beverly Russell, only a few months prior to her children’s murders. Smith feared her estranged husband would make her affair public, and in a “suicidal panic”, she was desperate to stop him (“Former Lover” A3).

On July 22, 1995, Susan Smith was found guilty on two counts of murder. Despite pleas in favor of the death penalty from Alex Smith, as well as Susan’s brother, the jury sentenced Susan Smith to life in prison (“Carolina Jury Rejects” A1).

ANALYSIS OF THE PRESS COVERAGE OF SUSAN SMITH

Susan as the “Evil Mother” Character

Even before authorities suspected Susan Smith of murdering her two sons, journalists consistently constructed this mother’s narrative in a negative manner. Smith did not fit the media’s definition of the “perfect mother” and therefore warranted suspicion and an “evil mother” narrative, even before authorities questioned Smith and her account of the night’s events. While acknowledging Smith’s feelings of fear and anguish over her missing boys, several articles published during these first few days blamed Smith for not preventing the kidnapping of her children and questioned her innocence in the carjacking. While “Mrs. Smith was sick with grief”, she continued to ask “herself how she could have let the man drive away with her sons...She just thought when she got out of the car he’d let her have them” (“An Agonizing Search” A4). Smith “begged [the armed attacker] to let her take the children with her, but the man told her: ‘I don’t have time. I’ll take care of them’” (“Town Prays” A11). The young mother stood in the middle of the road and “watched in shock as the man drove away with her children” (“Town Prays” A11).

Calling into question Smith’s status as a “perfect mother”, these descriptions paint her actions as more of a choice than a necessity, despite the barrel of a gun pointed at her head. Such newspaper articles reinforce Smith’s status as a substandard mother through the manner in which each describes her actions on the night of October 25, 1994. The “perfect mother” would never leave her children in a car with a strange man, no matter what the circumstances. She would fight for the safety of her babies, putting their lives and safety before her own; in the “perfect mother’s” narrative of that night, she would

have taken a bullet for the boys, rather and watch them drive off into the night. The “perfect mother”, however, would never have to face such horrific circumstances. Her children would not be out driving after dark, and would instead be tucked into bed, safe and warm, in the comfort and protection of their own home. The “perfect mother” would never be driving around with her boys asleep in the backseat of her car at nine o’clock at night, on the way to visit a man other than their father. Due to her role in the circumstances surrounding her children’s disappearance, Smith forfeited her claims to the status of good, loving, “perfect mother”, and thus shared the blame for the loss of her children.

The press’ suspicion of Smith from the start of the “kidnapping” is also seen in the language used to describe Smith’s account of the truth. During the first nine days of coverage of the Smith boys’ disappearance, every article overwhelmingly refers to Smith’s version of events using the words “said”, “told”, or “claimed”, rather than “was”, casting doubt over her story as early as day one. Phrases including, “Mrs. Smith said she was looking out the driver’s-side window” (“An Agonizing Search” A4), “Susan Smith told police that a man with a gun jumped into her car” (Vobejda A3), and “Smith says a man forced her from her car” (Davis A1) appear throughout each article’s narrative of Smith’s encounter. The use of these words evokes feelings of suspicion, implying that even if Smith alleges the events occurred in this manner, many others have reason to believe they did not. This language takes away Smith’s credibility right from the start, transforming her into an unsympathetic figure. Any mother who allegedly played a role in harming her own children does not deserve the public’s sympathy or prayers.

Once Smith reveals her true role in the disappearance and subsequent death of her children, she relinquishes any possible claims to the title of “good mother” and seals her fate in the completely negative, “evil mother” narrative. The “perfect mother” could never harm her children in any way, and could never continue with her life knowing her babies died because of her own actions. The reality of Smith’s actions would drive the “perfect mother” insane, certainly to the point of suicide, where she too would throw herself into the lake to be with her babies. Smith’s ability to fake the role of the “perfect mother”, and dupe her community into believing, her outraged society at large; “the role of a grieving mother is simply not one you are allowed to fake” (Douglas 164). Yet in faking this role, Smith demonstrated it is indeed possible to put on the façade of a “perfect mother” (Douglas 165); the “perfect mother” is certainly a socially constructed phenomenon. For Smith, the role of the “perfect mother” was simply a perfect performance gone wrong.

Susan as the Grieving Mother

In faking her performance as the “perfect mother”, however, Smith neglected to fulfill society’s expectations for the “perfect mother’s” stages of grief. Society needs to witness the “perfect mother” not only experiencing feelings of excruciating, crippling anguish and pain over the loss, even temporary loss of a child, but also the physical signs of this suffering. These signs include tears, quivering lips, shaking hands, ghostly pale complexion, dark circles under the eyes, and messy, unattractive hair. Even the “perfect mother” cannot be concerned with her appearance during such a horrific ordeal.

Each newspaper article overwhelmingly focuses on Smith’s grief more so than the grief of her husband, for even the most perfect of fathers cannot be as distraught as his

perfect wife. A missing child is “a mother’s agony” (Kennedy A6) and “a mother’s worst nightmare” (Rakowsky A1, “A Shocked S.C. A3, “Search for Two” A1). While several articles describe Smith as in “shock” after losing her children (“Town Prays” A11, “An Agonizing Search” A22, “Another Day of Pain” A1, Kennedy A6, “Mother Tells Authorities” A1), others criticize the mother for appearing too composed and showing little emotion when discussing their disappearance (Roeper 11).

This idea that Smith’s manner of grieving is incorrect or inconsistent with that of the “perfect mother” appears in several articles describing her appearance on the national morning talk show circuit on the very morning of the day she would later confess. Many journalists felt Smith did not shed enough tears in her ABC, CBS, and NBC television interviews, showing “no sign of shock...and getting more and more polished with each interview, even referring to some of the hosts by their first names” (Roeper 11). She also “slipped into the past tense several times, as if she knew something bad happened to the kids” (Roeper 11). Smith’s pink, floral outfit matched perfectly, as she sat calmly in a neat, well-decorated living room for each satellite interview. No dark circles appeared under her eyes, as if she slept through the night before with ease. While such a physical description would normally fit the “perfect mother” flawlessly, the circumstances surrounding Smith’s interview call for the “perfect mother’s” appearance to be the exact opposite of her normal, everyday look. Smith’s living room should not appear neat, as if she took the time to vacuum instead of searching for her lost babies, nor should she appear well-rested; no “perfect mother” could sleep when missing a child (Couric, Gibson, Smith).

Smith's voice was "too flat", and the claim that she "smiled at the television screen" too many times during these interviews was even used against Smith by one of the prosecution's expert witnesses at her murder trial ("Focus on Susan Smith" A11). Many people "felt less convinced of Susan Smith's story after watching her dry-eyed appearances on national television" (Eichel A1). In fact, according to the newspaper coverage of this case, the majority of tears shed for the Smith children did not fall from the eyes of Susan or David, but rather from those of the community of Union, South Carolina.

The Narrative of the "Perfect Community"

Throughout the coverage of the Smith "carjacking" and trial, the narrative of the "perfect community" resurfaces again and again. The "perfect mother" lives within the "perfect community", and while Smith certainly does not fit the definition of the "perfect mother", the "perfect community" continues to exist around her. The "perfect community" narrative plays out in the media's focus on Union, South Carolina as the quintessential small American town. "A town of about 10,000" (Vobejda A3), Union is "named for its history of churches coming together" ("A Shocked S.C." A3). A "close-knit" ("A Shocked S.C." A3), "small textile town" ("Search for Two" A3), Union is a place where "people don't lock their doors" (Rukowsky A1). "Violent death [in Union] usually means a hunting accident" (Rukowsky A1). The self-proclaimed "...city of hospitality" ("Search for Two A3), Union boasts, "the courthouse is still the biggest building" ("An Agonizing Search" A22).

Like any "perfect community", Union rallied around one of their own families in a time of need. During the search for the Smith boys, concerned citizens organized

search parties, candlelight vigils, and special services (“An Agonizing Search” A22). Townspeople participated in “hanging more than 400 yellow ribbons up and down the streets” of Union (Vobejda A3) and “gathered pledges for reward money” (Vobejda A3). They circulated “flyers and pictures of the children and a likeness of the suspect” (“Public Suspicion” A10) and nailed signs “expressing love, hope, and prayers for the Smiths” in their front lawns (“Search for Two” A3). “Even the cheerleaders at Friday night’s football game wore buttons in honor of the Smith boys” (Rukowsky A1). Neighbors described themselves as “so shook up [they] can’t even talk about it” (“Search for Two” A3). A good, God-fearing community, Union attempted to “pray the little boys home”, asking “God to touch [the kidnapper’s] heart and let [the boys] go” (“An Agonizing Search” A22). Townspeople believed the boys were “in the Lord’s hands, God [would] bring them home” (“Police Say Woman” A1).

These newspaper articles’ headlines reflect this emphasis on Union as the “perfect community”, including headlines such as, “Another Day of Pain/Lead Proves Fruitless in S.C. Carjack” (“Another Day of Pain” A1), “Carjacking Stuns S.C. Community” (Rakowsky A1), “A Shocked S.C. Town Asks ‘Why?’” (“A Shocked S.C.” A3), “In S.C. Fury Over Deaths” (Sennott A1), “S.C. Tragedy Has Its Roots in Troubled Life” (“S.C. Tragedy” A1), “Shaken Town Mourns Two Slain Boys” (“Shaken Town” A1), “Town Feels ‘Pain, Betrayal’ Outrage” (“Town Feels ‘Pain’” A3), and “Anguished Town Says Goodbye to Young Victims” (“Anguished Town A1).

After Smith’s confession, however, the “perfect community’s” support and love appropriately turned to feelings of “confusion, grief, outrage...and disappointment” at this evil mother’s actions and deceptions (Lee A1). The people of Union were described

as “shocked” (Kennedy A6, Fields A1, “A Shocked S.C.” A3), “horrified” (“Jeers Greet” A1) and “reeling” with anger and resentment (Kennedy A6). At her arraignment and trial, “angry mobs greeted Smith with cries of ‘Baby Killer’ and ‘Murderer’” forcing police to employ extra officers to ensure her safety (Lee A1). Smith betrayed the love and support of her perfect town, something a perfect mom would never do. And while the “perfect community” abandoned this less-than perfect mother, Union continued to support her innocent, perfect sons. “Hundred of mourners” from Union attended the boys’ funeral (“Shaken Town” A1). These “grieving townspeople...sobbed, hugged, [and replaced] their yellow ribbons of hope with blue ribbons of remembrance” (“Shaken Town” A1). The elaborate descriptions and strong focus on Smith’s “perfect community” found in the majority of these articles juxtapose Smith’s truly evil nature; not even a loving, supportive, close-knit, God-fearing town like that of Union, South Carolina could prevent this woman from, or forgive her for, harming her beautiful baby boys.

Susan as the “Perfect Wife”

Susan Smith’s marital status also contributed to her inability to adequately fulfill the narrative of the “perfect mother”; the dissolution of her marriage prevented Smith from being a part of the “perfect family”. Society tolerates a single mother to a certain degree, on the condition that this woman fits the “perfect mother” model in every other aspect. Smith, however, a single mom in the process of a divorce, was not only dating another man before the legal termination of her marriage, but was also in the habit of visiting men, other than her husband or boyfriend, with her boys. The newspaper

coverage of Smith's situation focused heavily on her shattered, imperfect family, continuously referring to the Smith's as a "divorced" or "separated" couple.

In the nine days preceding Smith's confession, both newspaper articles and national television news segments varied in their descriptions of the Smith's as married, husband and wife, separated, or legally divorced. Clarity on this issue did not appear important to the media; the Smith's appeared as united and descriptions of the two mirrored this image. Several articles refer to the Smith's as "Susan Smith, and her husband, David" ("Public Suspicion" A10), repeatedly using the phrases "husband" and "wife" to describe the relationship between the two, detailing how, "David Smith gently squeezed his wife's shoulder" and "[David's] wife urged Michael and Alex to be strong" ("Another Day of Pain" A1). In Susan and David's ABC, CBS, and NBC television interviews, the couple sat extremely close to one another, with arms and hands linked. David Smith rubbed Susan's hand and the two appeared completely united as husband and wife (Couric, Gibson, Smith). Several newspaper articles neglect to mention the status of the couple at all, simply referring to the Smith's as the "parents" of the young boys: "suspicion shifts to the parents, Susan and David Smith" (Rakowsky A1).

The few newspaper articles during these first days that do acknowledge Susan Smith's separation from her husband portray the split in a positive light. The Smith's continued to "celebrate their sons' birthdays together", after reaching "a friendly divorce settlement that gave [Susan] custody and allowed [David] visitation" ("Another Day of Pain" A1). "Although the Smith's are separated and getting a divorce... the couple have appeared together to appeal for the safe return of their boys ("Search for Two" A3). The marital status of Susan and David Smith was not important to the media when this family

appeared to be the “perfect”, all-American, nuclear family. After Susan’s confession and fall from grace, however, her lack of the title of “wife” becomes a central issue in the press, another flaw in her maternal image.

In the days following Smith’s confession, and even during her subsequent trial, David Smith never refers to her as his “wife”, instead choosing to refer to the mother of his children simply as “Susan”. Unlike during their television appearances together, David Smith does not want any confusion regarding his relationship to the accused Susan. In a similar manner, newspaper articles after Smith’s confession never mistake David for Smith’s “husband”, carefully referring to David Smith as, her “estranged husband” (Kennedy A6, “Jeers Greet” A1, Lee A1, “Mom’s Boys Alive” A1, “Mother Tells Authorities” A1) or “the boys’ father” (“Police Say Woman” A1, “Mom’s Boys Alive” A1, Eichel A1). Several articles even mistakenly refer to the couple as legally “divorced” (“A Shocked S.C.” A3, Sennott A1).

“Mother” vs. “Woman”

The headlines of the newspaper articles covering the Smith carjacking and trial also reflect the media’s overarching narrative of Smith’s fall to the status of “evil mother”. While Smith was still believed innocent, the headlines of the articles describing her sons’ abduction either do not refer to Smith at all or label her as simply, “mother” (Kennedy A6, “Public Suspicion” A10). The headlines that neglect to mention Smith focus on the “boys” instead. Such headlines include, “Officials Express Fears of Safety of Missing Boys” (“Officials Express” A3), “Search for Two Tots Shifts to Hometown” (“Search for Two” A3), and “An Agonizing Search for Two Boys” (“An Agonizing Search” A22). Other articles during these nine days contain headlines identifying Smith

not by her name, but rather as “mother”: “Neighbor: Mom Was Crazy About Her Kids” (Kennedy A6); “Public Suspicion Focuses on Mother as Police Search for Boys” (“Public Suspicion” A10). Very few articles use the terms “Smith” or “Susan Smith” to describe this mother in its headlines, even though Susan Smith was certainly a household name at this time.

Smith’s confession on the ninth day, however, marks a change in the media’s use of the term “mother”. Headlines containing the terms “mom” or “mother” to describe Smith are scarce, and when they do, it is usually coupled with terms such as “death”, “murder”, or “arrest”. Headlines such as “Mom Killed Kids” (Fields A1), “Mom Arrested in S.C.” (“Mom Arrested” A1), and “Mother Held in Deaths of ‘Carjacked’ Children” (“Mother Held in Deaths” A1), serve to juxtapose these very different terms and shock the reader: society places mothers and murderers on opposite ends of the spectrum.

More prevalent, however, are headlines during the days following Smith’s arrest referring to Smith simply as “woman”: “Before Boys Died, Woman Says Her Life ‘Falling Apart’” (“Before Boys Died” A3); “Police Say Woman Admits to Killings as Bodies of Two Children are Found Inside Her Car” (“Police Say Woman” A1); “In S. Carolina, an Angry Arraignment; Mob at Courthouse Jeers Woman Who Concocted Tales of Sons’ Abduction” (Lee A1); “Carolina Jury Rejects Execution for Woman Who Drowned Sons” (“Carolina Jury” A1). When Smith is still believed innocent, when she may still be the “perfect mother”, and when her children may still be alive, journalists refer to her as “mother” or “mom”. As soon as her “perfect” concept is stripped away forever and Smith’s children are known to be dead, the media removes the title of

“mother”; her children died at her own hands and she no longer deserves such a title.

“Mom’s Boys Alive as Car Sank in Lake; Woman Held Without Bail” is one headline that exemplifies this occurrence (“Mom’s Boys Alive” A1). While the boys are still on this earth, Smith continues to retain her title as “mother”; in jail for murdering her babies, Smith is no longer a “mother”, but rather a lowly “woman”.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A year and a half after the Susan Smith scandal, Texas mom Darlie Routier also stood accused of murdering her two sons in their sleep. The backgrounds of these two women, as well as their mirroring narratives in the press, show Smith and Routier share more than southern roots.

DARLIE ROUTIER

The Entitled Mother

Bubbly and blonde, twenty-six year old Darlie Routier appeared to have the perfect, storybook life. Described by friends and neighbors as a popular and devoted young mother, Routier lived with her husband, Darin Routier, and their three children, Devon (six years old), Damon (five years old), and baby Drake (eight months old) in a beautiful colonial house in the affluent Dallas community of Rowlett, Texas (“Mother’s Arrest” 26). Darin Routier owned and operated a newly successful electronics company, while Darlie stayed at home to take care of their house and children. Living what appeared to be the American dream, the Routier’s grew “accustomed to luxuries, including their costly house near Lake Ray Hubbard; expensive jewelry, clothes and vehicles; a cabin cruiser and vacations” (“Prosecutor Says Frustration” A1).

While Darin’s business thrived at first, he began to experience financial difficulties in January of 1996. This slow in sales, coupled with expenses from the birth of the Routier’s third child, Drake, compounded the couple’s money problems and massive debts began to pile up. With only two-thousand dollars left in the Routier’s bank account, a local bank rejected Darin’s five-thousand dollar loan application. Darlie Routier also felt the repercussions of her family’s fiscal constraints (“Prosecutor Says

Frustration” A1). Routier confessed her feelings of desperation regarding money issues to her best friend and maid-of-honor, Barbara Jovell, as well as her frustrations with her inability to lose weight after giving birth to baby Drake several months earlier. Routier allegedly detailed her recent use of diet pills, as well as several thoughts of suicide to Jovell, who immediately ordered her friend off these pills for fear that they, in addition to Routier’s “postpartum blues after birth”, were negatively affecting the young mother’s mood (“Diary Reveals” A1). Routier also wrote these depressed feelings in her diary, and expressed a desire to commit suicide in an effort to break the never-ending cycle of housework and child rearing (“Routier’s Suicide Thoughts” A29).

The events of June 6, 1996 smashed whatever chance Darlie and Darin had of every reconstructing their image as the perfect couple and family. While these events are not, and may never be, perfectly clear, no one can dispute that the Routier’s two oldest sons, Devon, six, and Damon, five, were brutally murdered, asleep in their own home on that hot summer night. According to Darlie Routier, at approximately 2:30 a.m. an intruder, later described as a white male, wearing a dark shirt, jeans, and a baseball cap, entered her home by slicing through the screen of a garage window (O’Hanlon 29). Darlie had fallen asleep downstairs on a couch in her family room, with her two oldest sons also sleeping on couches nearby. Darin and infant Drake slept together upstairs in the master bedroom (“Mother’s Arrest” 26). The stranger then stabbed Devon and Damon to death with a kitchen knife. Darlie awoke to Devon’s faint scream, “Mommy”, and found the intruder standing over her with the knife ready in hand. A brief struggle ensued between the two, with Darlie sustaining only minor cuts and bruises, and the

assailant fled into the garage to escape. Darlie's screams woke her sleeping husband and the two proceeded to frantically call 9-1-1 for help ("Mother's Arrest" 26).

The authorities, however, immediately noticed glaring inconsistencies in Darlie Routier's account of her sons' murders. Police believed the blood evidence proved Darlie was stabbed in her kitchen, by the sink, not in the family room where she told police she had been sleeping when attacked. The police also found only one pair of bloody barefoot footprints, belonging to Darlie, originating at the kitchen sink and following a trail to and from the family room several times. A search of the Routier's home recovered a knife in a kitchen drawer that had been used to cut the window screen the intruder used to enter the garage (O'Hanlon 19). Police believed Routier used this knife to slash the screen, approached her sleeping children, and stabbed them repeatedly. Prosecutors alleged Routier stabbed her older son, Devon, so hard in the chest she broke several of his ribs, and she stabbed her younger son, Damon, five times in the back. Police believe Routier then threw the murder weapon into her garage, went back into the kitchen, and stabbed herself with a knife causing "shallow...wounds on her neck, shoulders, chin, and fingers" (Schutze 1). Also casting suspicion towards the young housewife, the family's garage door was closed and locked from the inside when the police arrived. The intruder would have needed to escape the same way he entered, through the cut in the screen; a thick layer of dust on the window sill, however, indicated no one had entered or exited in this manner for quite some time. No footprints were ever found outside this window or in the flowerbed adjacent to the garage (Schutze 1).

From the very beginning, police cited Routier's "inappropriate behavior" as evidence of her guilt. Authorities' account of that night's events details, "minutes after

she called 9-1-1 at 2:31 a.m. on June 6,” with one child still bleeding, fighting for his life, Routier neglected to “stop his bleeding, even when a police officer told her to do so” (Schutze 1). Instead, Routier was preoccupied with her own wounds, pressing a wet rag against the superficial scrapes on her neck (Schutze 1). Emergency Room nurses would later testify that Routier appeared calm, and almost cold, at her dying son’s bedside; she never showed “any signs of hysteria common among mothers who have just lost children” (“Routier’s Behavior” A34). Police were also suspicious of Routier’s initial conversation with the 9-1-1 dispatcher. After this operator warned Routier not to touch any evidence, the mother explained she moved a bloody knife from the garage floor. Later, Routier changed her story regarding the knife and why she picked it up when explicitly told not to do so. Routier also modified several other fundamental aspects of her story regarding the order of events that night, first claiming she awoke to the intruder standing over her, then changing her account, claiming the intruder was leaving the family room as she woke up (Schutze 1).

On February 2, 1997, after nearly ten hours of deliberation, a jury convicted Darlie Routier of capital murder (“Texas Woman Convicted” A25) and subsequently sentenced her to death by lethal injection (“Jury Orders Death” A1). Despite this guilty verdict and sentence of death, Darlie Routier’s case is far from open and shut. Since the Routier verdict, several key developments have strengthened Darlie Routier’s chance for a new trial. In April of 1998, The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals ordered the arrest of the head stenographer in the Routier trial, after finding 33,000 errors in the trial transcript (“Court Issues Arrest” A24). Then in July of 2000, the court revealed fifty-three pages of the trial record were missing the proper audio tape accompaniment (Moore A1).

Proponents for Routier's appeal have grown in strength and number since several media outlets have openly supported Routier and her claims of innocence, or at the very least, her request for a new trial. On February 3, 2000, CBS's "20/20" debuted "Her Flesh and Blood", an episode which examined the Routier case and questioned, among other things, the prosecution's failure to turn over an unidentified bloody finger print to the defense. This episode also detailed the conflict of interest surrounding Darlie's lawyer, who also represented her husband, and orchestrated an immunity deal with the district attorney for Darin Routier. The ultimate confession, however, came from Darlie's own husband, as he finally came forward in July of 2002 with the information that he had in fact searched for someone to burglarize his home as part of an insurance scam to get his business out of debt in the weeks preceding the murders of his sons. Despite all of these questions surrounding the guilt, innocence, and fair trial of Darlie Routier, she continues to remain on death row, awaiting yet another appeal, a new trial, or an execution (Brown).

ANALYSIS OF THE PRESS COVERAGE OF DARLIE ROUTIER

Darlie as the Conceited, “Evil Mother Character”

Like Susan Smith, Darlie Routier also attempted to falsely portray herself to her community as the “perfect mother” character within the “perfect mother” narrative. To some, Routier may have publicly appeared to fit the physical description of the “perfect mother”, always well-dressed and put-together. Yet after the death of her two children, the media exposed Routier’s true status as an “evil mother”. As Routier’s mirage of the perfect family and perfect lifestyle began to fade away, Routier’s true selfish, superficial, and conceited nature appeared. These characteristics do not qualify as the correct qualities for a “good mom”. Instead of worrying about her two older boys and her newborn son, Routier focused her time and energy on “her inability to lose weight after the birth of her third son” (“Prosecutor Says Frustration” A1), even taking diet pills to regain her slim figure (“Routier’s Suicide Thoughts” A29). The “perfect mother” would never be so concerned with her appearance; for her, the weight gained during pregnancy is simply an inconvenient side-effect compared to the joy of bringing a new life into the world. The “perfect mother” never needs to resort to drugs of any kind to maintain her perfect physical appearance; she simply adjusts back to her normal figure naturally and with ease.

Routier continued to be criticized by the press for placing an emphasis on her appearance even during her trial. When Routier’s lawyers asked the judge to grant the accused mother a “hair appointment...since her bleached blonde hair had grown out, leaving unattractive dark roots”, the media described this request as “a little bit unusual” (Thomas A2). Such a haircut is standard procedure for defendants in criminal trials, as

physical appearance weighs heavily on the opinions of the jury. Yet Routier, because of her status as a mother more concerned with her waistline than the whereabouts of her children, is scolded for such an “unusual” demand (Thomas A2). The “perfect mother” in this narrative would still be mourning the loss of her boys and proclaiming her innocence, not spending a day at the salon prior to her murder trial.

While the “perfect mother” must fulfill conventional standards of beauty and also maintain the correct social and economic status, she never places the importance of her appearance, social life, or finances over the care of children. Routier, however, is described by the press as a “self-centered woman” (“Prosecutor Says Frustration” A1), “cold” (“Prosecutor Says Frustration” A1), “materialistic” (“Prosecutor Says Frustration” A1, “Routier’s Suicide Thoughts” A29), and “obsessed with luxuries” (“Routier’s Suicide Thoughts” A2) and her “lavish lifestyle” (“Prosecutor Says Frustration” A1). She is a “vain status-seeker, who was driven to murder her two young sons when her looks and lavish lifestyle started to crumble around her” (“Prosecutor Says Frustration” A1). Routier constantly fought with her husband about money (“Routier’s Suicide Thoughts” A29), angry that their new financial situation would mean no more expensive jewelry, designer clothes, or family vacation house by the lake (“Prosecutor Says Frustration” A1). The “perfect mother” would be content with a happy and healthy family.

The press’ criticism of Routier as a “bad mother” continues even into the sentencing phase of her trial. While her ability to mother is irrelevant to the danger Routier may pose to society, witnesses at her sentencing hearing testified Routier allegedly “spent Mother’s Day with male strippers”, “publicly humiliated her

children...and harshly disciplined her boys in public”, often allowing her children “to be in unsafe circumstances” (“Routier Gave Baby Sitter” A13). Routier’s “boys often played unsupervised on their busy street and sometimes rode bikes in the street several blocks away” and were allowed “to ride on the family boat without life jackets” despite not knowing “how to swim yet” (“Routier Gave Baby Sitter” A13). In accordance with the “perfect mother” narrative, Routier’s inability to properly mother her children translates into her inability to be not only a good woman, but a good person as well. Society believes Routier must not only be punished for murdering her children, but also for failing to be a “perfect mother” for them while they were still alive.

Similar to the media coverage of Susan Smith, the press’ rejection of Routier’s role in the “perfect mother” narrative occurs instantaneously. Articles immediately following the Routier tragedy refer to the mother’s account of the event with the terms “said”, “told” and “claimed”: “Routier told police that an intruder came through the window and stabbed” her two sons (O’Hanlon 19); “She said the attacker was a man who wore dark clothes and a baseball cap” (O’Hanlon 19); “She told [police] that she and the boys had been attacked downstairs by a white male intruder” (Schutze A1); “Mrs. Routier...says that she is not guilty” (“Mother’s Arrest” A26); Routier “said she awoke to find a young white man...over her, knife in hand” (“Mother’s Arrest A26); “She claims an intruder stabbed her and her sons” (“Accused Mom” A17).

In opposition to these descriptions of Routier’s accounts, the authorities’ version of events are described with active verbs, such as “was”: “Blood evidence shows Routier was stabbed in the kitchen, not in the living room as she told police” (O’Hanlon 19); “Darlie Routier slashed a garage window screen...went back to her sleeping boys...and

stabbed them repeatedly” (Schutze A1); “She placed the murder weapon on the garage floor...and inflicted shallow stab and slash wounds on her neck, shoulder, chin and fingers” (Schutze A1). The use of these verbs in articles immediately following the murder of the Routier boys demonstrates the media’s instantaneous suspicion of Darlie Routier. In the eyes of the media, such an evil, horrible mother must be guilty.

Darin Routier as the “Perfect Father”

In addition to the narrative of the “perfect mother”/“evil mother”, each of the newspaper articles analyzed included one interesting similarity: a lack of focus on Darlie’s husband and the boys’ father, Darin Routier, in terms of both his grief and his possible involvement in his sons’ murders. The absence of Darin Routier from the narrative emphasizes the importance of the “perfect mother’s” role in the “perfect family” narrative. This narrative holds the “perfect mother” as the sole caretaker and protector of the family’s children; she alone is responsible for sacrificing her life for theirs. This explains society’s shock and horror when, instead of protecting her young, a mother, like Routier, inflicts pain on her own babies. Head prosecutor Toby Shook perfectly exemplified this point in his closing argument at Darlie Routier’s trial, as he described “the most horrible part” of the Routier case: “Damon [who did not die immediately] opened his eyes, and he saw who was murdering him. He saw her. He saw his mother” (“Jury in Texas” A1). This emphasis on the mother’s role as the protector of her children may explain why Routier has had such a difficult time procuring a new trial despite countless irregularities in her court proceedings, including new evidence such as an unidentified bloody fingerprint and her husband’s confession that he had searched for someone to stage a burglary just weeks before the death of his sons (Brown). The

narrative of the “perfect mother” holds this woman ultimately responsible for the well-being and safety of her children, no matter what the circumstances, thus retracting any blame from the father, Darin Routier.

Darlie as the Grieving Mother

The idea of the “perfect mother’s” perfect grief also arises in the narrative of Darlie Routier. From the very beginning of the coverage of the Routier murders, Darlie is accused by the press of not grieving properly for a mother who just lost two of her babies. “Routier’s behavior was inappropriate from the moment the first officer arrived at her house, minutes after she called 9-1-1” (Schutze A1). “One child was still hanging on to life, but she never tried to stop his bleeding, even when a police officer told her to do so. Instead she was preoccupied with her own wounds” (Schutze A1). “Despite the fact she knew [the boys] were alive, Routier never made any attempts to stop their bleeding, touch them, or render other aid” (Schutze A1). Not only did Routier fail to attend to her dying children, she “was preoccupied with the only minor wound on her neck...and was fixated on explaining why her fingerprints were on the knife” (“Mother’s Arrest” A26). When Darin Routier “came downstairs and discovered the scene, Darlie Routier was already making the 9-1-1 call but did not inquire about his or the baby’s condition” (Schutze A26). The “perfect mother” would never put her own wounds above those of her children, and would only worry about her innocence after all three of her babies, and her husband, were safely attended to.

The press accused this “evil mother” of continuously showing “a lack of remorse” for her sons’ deaths (“Routier’s Suicide Thoughts” A2), citing their funeral, where she “sprayed Silly String...while family members sang ‘Happy Birthday’”, as a prime

example of her cold-heartedness (O'Hanlon 19). At this "sick" (Routier's Suicide Thoughts" A2) "graveside birthday party for one of her two murdered sons" (O'Hanlon 19), "an upbeat Darlie Router led an inappropriate birthday celebration" (Schutze A1), complete with music and balloons. Routier later claimed she orchestrated this "graveside party" to celebrate her sons' lives; she believed the boys would have wanted everyone to be happy despite the horrifically sad circumstances (O'Hanlon 19). This explanation, however, does not justify her "inappropriate" actions for the press as well as the prosecution, who used the tape of his "party" against Routier at her trial (Schutze A1).

Routier's inability to respond to her boys' deaths in the manner of a "perfect mother" is also detailed in her unsuitable actions while in the hospital after the "attack". When her best friend, Barbara Jovell visited Routier in the hospital the day after her sons' deaths, Routier asked Jovell to remove sexual toys hidden in the Routier's master bedroom; Routier was afraid the police would find the toys in a search of her home. Jovell, subscribing to the "perfect mother" narrative, "scolded Routier for worrying about such things when her two children had just been murdered" ("Routier's Suicide Thoughts" A2). Inconsolable from the loss of her children, the "perfect mother" would be too upset to ever think of such trivial things.

Two nurses from the hospital also testified to Routier's inappropriate response to her children's deaths, as the mother "shunned her surviving [infant] son when he was brought to her bedside" directly after the attack ("Routier's Behavior" A34). The nurses claimed while Routier was "tearful when asking who would have stabbed her and her sons, her demeanor on June 6 was not typical for a grieving mother" ("Routier's Behavior A34). This mother "never used a tissue to wipe her face...or needed a

Kleenex”; instead she “whined” and “didn’t show the hysteria common among mothers who have just lost children” (“Routier’s Behavior A34). Routier “never said anything about the boys” and the hospital staff and Routier’s extended family “seemed more moved by the tragedy than Routier” herself (“Routier’s Behavior” A34). When her husband brought Darlie’s youngest, unharmed son to her bed, the mother “touched the baby’s toes but never reached up. She never held her surviving son, even though the baby reached out for his mother” (“Routier’s Behavior” A34). This incredibly powerful image of a mother shunning her baby epitomizes Darlie Routier’s status in the “evil mother” narrative.

Routier’s response to both her guilty verdict and sentencing afterward reinforced the press’ depiction of Darlie Routier as “cold” and evil. The mother “didn’t shed a tear when she heard the decision” from the jury when she was convicted of her own sons’ murders (“Jury Orders Death Penalty” A1); she was also “stone-faced” when she heard her sentence of death (“Mother in Texas Gets” A8). This lack of emotion runs contrary to society’s expectations of both an innocent mother and an innocent defendant.

“Mother” vs. “Woman”

Much like in the coverage of the Susan Smith case, the use of the words “mother” or “woman” in the headlines describing Darlie Routier exemplify the differences between the “perfect mother” and “evil mother” narratives. Headlines that reference Routier as “mother” do so not to complete the “perfect mother” narrative, but rather to juxtapose this term with words such as “jail”, “stabbed”, “accused” and “murder”. Such headlines include: “Mother’s Arrest in Sons’ Killings Has a Texas Town in Disbelief” (“Mother’s Arrest” A1), “Accused Mom” (“Accused Mom” A17), “Mother to Remain in Jail”

(“Mother to Remain” A34), and “Convicted Child-Killer Mom Gains Varied, Local Support” (Moore A1). These headlines intend to shock and appall the audience, who expect a “perfect mother” narrative all the time, and may feel both outraged and curious when an “evil mother” narrative appears.

The use of the word “woman” to describe Routier, on the other hand, shows the press’ attempt to strip Darlie of the title “mother” since she no longer deserves to be referred to as such. In killing her children, Routier relinquished all rights to claim these babies as her own. Headlines such as “Texas Cops Say Woman Killed Sons and Covered It Up” (O’Hanlon 19), “Jury in Texas Convicts Woman of Killing Two Sons; She Blamed Slayings on Intruder at Home” (“Jury in Texas” A1), “Texas Woman is Convicted in Sons’ Deaths” (“Texas Woman is Convicted” A25), “Woman Guilty of Sons’ Deaths” (“Woman Guilty” A12), “Texas Woman Convicted in the Murder of Sons” (“Texas Woman Convicted” A25), and “Dallas Woman is Sentenced To Death in Murder of Sons” (Verbose A12) provide examples of these instances.

Headlines which include both the terms “mother” and “woman” do so in a very specific manner. These headlines combine the elements of shock and disgust, simultaneously revoking the title of “mother” and shocking the reader by juxtaposing this title with words like “slayings” and “death penalty”: “26-Year-Old Held in Sons’ Slayings; Mom’s Story Full of Holes, Police Charge; Woman Would Not Assist Dying Child, Affidavit Says” (Schutze A1); “Mother Faces Death Penalty/ Woman Killed Sons Then Slashed Her Throat, Prosecutors Say” (Krum A20); “Mother in Texas Gets Death Sentence; Authorities Say Woman Staged Attack on Sons” (“Mother in Texas Gets” A8). These headlines serve as a warning; should a “mother” commit unnatural acts such as

these, she will not only fall into the “evil mother” category, but worse, she will lose the title of “mother” all together. In stripping Smith and Routier of the identity of “mother”, the press rights these women’s wrongs in the “perfect mother” narrative, casting them out of the group of “mothers” forever.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The narrative of Andrea Yates reflects the fact that this mother shares many characteristics with both Smith and Routier. Unlike the other women, however, Yates suffered from a well documented history of mental illness and postpartum depression, causing her narrative to take a unique twist away from the classic “evil mother” story.

ANDREA YATES

The Damaged Mother

Before Andrea Pia Kennedy and Russell, “Rusty”, Yates wed in 1993, they agreed to have a “traditional marriage”, adhering to the teachings of Russell’s form of fundamentalist Christianity. This sect of Christianity, described by some as a “cult”, was led by religious mentor and traveling preacher, Michael Woronieck (“Husband Testifies” A16). Woronieck taught, among other things, that “women are tainted by the sins of ‘Mother Eve’, and if they fail to raise their children right, they should be ‘drowned in the depth of the sea’” (Nathan T05). Russell faithfully followed these teachings, and insisted the natural state of marriage was for “man [to be] the breadwinner and the woman’s [role is] the homemaker” (“Husband Testifies” A16). Immediately following their marriage, Yates left her job as a psychiatric nurse to begin a family with her new husband. This large family eventually consisted of Andrea, Russell, and their five children: Noah, seven; John, five; Paul, three; Luke, two; and Mary, six months. The Yates family bought a very small home near NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Clear Lake Texas, a Houston suburb, where Russell worked as a NASA computer specialist. This small, cramped living space, despite their five children and Russell’s ample salary, adhered to Woronieck’s teachings and emphasis on living “the simple life” (Nichols L14). Russell

set up a strict, rigid schedule for his wife and kids; Andrea took care of the house and children while Rusty worked. Andrea was allowed three hours of time each week to do whatever she wanted without the children (“Husband Testifies” A16).

Described by friends and neighbors as a gentle woman and a loving mother, Yates was well-known for her giving, sweet nature. The quintessential caring mother and daughter, Yates home-schooled her children and cared for her ill father before his death (Shipp 31). Usually upbeat, after the birth of her fourth son, Luke, in 1999, Yates suffered from severe postpartum depression, and was hospitalized in a mental institution several times, including once for an attempted suicide (O’Hare B4). Andrea’s mental and physical state eventually improved with the help of her doctors; she was released from the hospital and warned by her psychiatrist “not to have any more children because another pregnancy could cause an even more severe breakdown” (O’Hare B4). Yet, the Yates’ form of fundamental Christianity scorned birth control, and one year later, Andrea became pregnant with Mary (Nathan T05).

After the death of Andrea’s father in March of 2001, friends noticed an immense change in Yates’ demeanor and appearance. Andrea appeared lethargic all the time, her face ghostly white with pronounced dark circles under her eyes. She paced through the house all day, walking in circles, shaking, and scratching her scalp so hard her hair fell out (Parker A3). Andrea also neglected her personal hygiene. Her feet were dirty and black, her hair “matted and greasy”; neighbors believed she had not brushed her teeth in months (O’Hare B4). The thirty-six-year-old mother confessed to feeling overwhelmed and trapped (“Husband Testifies” A16). Yates truly frightened those who loved her when

she began to hear what she believed to be Satan's voice, and her doctor once again prescribed her Haldol, a drug commonly used to treat severe psychosis (O'Hare B4).

On June 20, 2001, Russell Yates left home for work at around nine a.m., reminding Andrea that his mother would arrive to help with the children about an hour later. By the time Andrea's mother-in-law arrived, however, it was too late. Andrea had already methodically drowned her five children: first two-year-old Luke, then three-year-old Paul; next five-year-old John, followed by his sister Mary, only six months old. Seven-year-old Noah "entered the bathroom while Yates was downing his six-month-old baby sister" and asked his mother, "What's wrong with Mary?" ("Bathtub Mom Told Cops" 6). Yates then chased Noah through the house, grabbed him by his ankles, and dragged him back into the bathroom, before finally "forcing him under [water], legs kicking and arms flailing" (Steyn 37). After all five of her children were dead, Yates carried each "limp child into a back bedroom, placed the child on the bed, and covered the body with a sheet. She left Noah's body in the bathtub" ("Bathtub Mom Told Cops" 6). Andrea proceeded to call 9-1-1 and her husband at work, telling Rusty, "You need to come home" ("Bathtub Mom Told Cops" 6). He would later tell the press he knew by her tone something was horribly wrong ("Bathtub Mom Told Cops" 6).

Russell arrived home to find police already inside his house. Andrea allegedly greeted the responding officer at her front door, soaking wet, with the pleasantry, "I just killed my children" ("Mother Allegedly Drowns" A2). Yates confessed to police that she drowned her five children because she was a "bad mother"; her children were not "developing correctly" under her care (Rendon A1). Yates later told psychiatrists, "My children were not righteous. I let them stumble. They were doomed to perish in the fires

of hell,” (Christian C1). The way she had raised them, her babies could never be “saved”; essentially Yates believed she had no choice but to kill her children, in order to save them from Satan (Christian C1).

Russell testified on behalf of his wife during the court proceedings that followed, explaining, “On the one hand, I know she killed our children. On the other, I know that the woman here is not the woman who killed my children. That wasn’t her; she wasn’t in her right frame of mind” (“Drowned Kids’ Father Still Stands” 6). Despite these statements of support from her husband (Charisse A1), a jury convicted Yates of murder, rejecting her insanity defense, as well as the prosecution’s request for a lethal injection, instead sentencing Yates to life in prison (“Life For Killer Mom” 2). In July of 1994, Russell filed for divorce from his wife, and remarried again in March of 2006, to a woman he met in church (Langford B1). On July 6, 2005, three years after the conviction and sentencing of Andrea Yates, the First Texas Court of Appeals ruled that false “testimony from a state’s expert witness...may have affected the jury’s judgment”, and granted Yates’ attorneys’ appeal for a new trial (Tilgham A1). On July 26, 2006, the verdict of this second trial, not guilty by reason of insanity, sent Yates to a state mental hospital, where she remains today, until doctors “determine she is not a danger to herself or others” (Lezon A1).

ANALYSIS OF THE PRESS COVERAGE OF ANDREA YATES

Andrea as the “Perfect Mother”, Fallen From Grace

While containing similar elements to the narratives of both Susan Smith and Darlie Routier, the narrative of Andrea Yates and the murder of her five children varies from the previous “evil mother” narrative. While several articles attempt to characterize Yates as the stereotypical deviant mother, most press coverage portrayed this woman in a slightly more sympathetic light than Smith or Routier. Yates’ narrative contains several characteristics missing from the narrative of the two mothers before her, perhaps contributing to the extremely sad nature of her narrative, even more so than the murders of the Smith and Routier boys.

Unlike Susan and Darlie, Andrea Yates “just didn’t fit the profile of a parent who would kill her kids” (“Mother Allegedly” A2). Neighbors described the Yates’ as a “very close family,” who “seemed to get along real well” (“Mother Allegedly” A2); Andrea home-schooled her five children, taught them to ride bikes, and played with them outside every day. Yates “devoted her life” to caring for her children (“Mother Allegedly” A2). And while the narratives of Smith and Routier contained at least the appearance of this “perfect mother” narrative, unlike Yates, each, secretly harbored “evil mother” characteristics and tendencies in the eyes of the press. The press could accuse Susan Smith of murdering her boys to please her lover and Darlie Routier of stabbing her boys to death in an effort to regain financial stability and social status; Andrea Yates however, desired neither love nor material possessions and thus deflected any accusations of possessing such “evil mother” characteristics like selfishness or conceitedness. The

absence of these elements from Andrea Yates' narrative is reflected in the press coverage of this mother and her two trials.

Andrea as the Mentally Incapacitated Mother

While one article does describe the murder of Yates' children as "the crime of ultimate betrayal of a mother to her children" (Kolker A2), the majority of the newspaper coverage of this woman "views Andrea Yates as psychologically disturbed rather than hopelessly evil" ("Most in Poll" A23). Several articles describe the death of the Yates children as a "tragedy" ("Kids' Dad" A1, Shipp 31, "A Sad Farewell" A1, Della Cava D1, Kolker A2, Belli A1, "Rusty Yates' Actions" A16, Nichols L14), while this powerful and sympathetic term remains absent from the coverage of both Smith and Routier. Yates' status as a "perfect mother", temporarily fallen from grace by circumstances out of her control, allows her actions to be described as "tragic" rather than evil.

The press coverage of Yates acknowledges this mother's "history of depression and suicide attempts" ("Mother Allegedly A2), as well as her long diagnosed battle with schizophrenia (Khanna B1, "Rusty Yates Seeks" A1, "Yates Again" A1, O'Hare B4). This history of mental illness aligns with society's beliefs regarding a mother who kills her own children and calls the police on herself afterwards: this woman must be crazy, seriously disturbed, or mentally incapacitated. The press' description of the manner in which the events transpired on the morning that Yates murdered her family conveys a very different sentiment than that of the carefully plotted murders of the Smith and Routier children. Yates not only chased her oldest child, seven-year-old Noah, through the house in a "frenzy" before drowning him, she also ritualistically placed each child's limp body in bed, tucking them under the sheets ("Mother Allegedly A2). Several

articles refer to the act of Yates drowning her children as “methodical” (“Bathtub Mom” A6, Della Cava D1) or “systematic” (“Drowned Kids” A6). These two terms signify a robotic motion and imply Yates lacked control over her own actions. This implication perfectly aligns with Yates’ history of mental illness and depression, as well as the press’ focus on the role of prescription drugs in Yates’ narrative, as several articles detail the mother’s history of treatment with medications such as Effexor, Remeron, Wellbtrin, and Haldol (Nazareno A1).

Yates’ actions after the murder of her children, as well as her physical appearance also contribute to her narrative as a mentally unstable mother, rather than an evil woman attempting to rid her life of children for selfish reasons. Unlike Smith and Routier, Andrea Yates contacted police and confessed to her crimes immediately after murdering her five children; never once did she try to hide her actions or blame another for the death of her babies. Her ragged and stereotypically crazy appearance also contributed to the press’ narrative of Yates as mentally disturbed from the moment the responding officer found Yates at her front door with “her clothes still damp” (Borger A2). Several articles describe, “A wet, bedraggled Yates called police” (“Life for Killer” A2), “wearing a shirt ripped in places” (Borger A2). “Her health and hygiene had deteriorated so badly...her teeth were gummy and gooey, as if she hadn’t brushed them in days. Her feet were black. Her body stunk. Her hair was matted and greasy” (O’Hare B4). Yates wore large, coke-bottle glasses and her hands shook uncontrollably (Belli A1). Police on the scene also noted Yates’ extremely slim figure, as well as her thinning hair and bald spots on her head: her best friend later explained Yates would “scratch her scalp until it bled” (Parker A3).

Yates' motivations for killing her children not only fail to match up with the selfish desires of the other two women in this study, but also highlight her status as a mentally incapacitated, rather than evil, mother. Even in killing her children, Yates attempted to fulfill the "perfect mother" role. She believed in taking the lives of her children, she was actually helping, protecting, and ultimately, saving them from harm at the hands of the devil ("Satanic Delusions" C1). In her eyes, Yates' children were "not developing normally" ("Jailhouse Visit" A1), and in taking their lives not only was she ending their suffering, but "saving them" ("Satanic Delusions" C1) from "hellfire" (Yardley A1, "Satanic Delusions" C1) and "damnation" (Yardley A1, DiManno A2). Yates "loved her five children to death. In her tortured, shattered mind, drowning those babies in nine inches of tub water seemed the more charitable fate. Better they should be slain, mercifully murdered in childhood, than raised in wickedness – an evil she could sense but not delineate – if drowning their little bodies meant saving their eternal souls from damnation" (DiManno A2). This mother "thought Satan was living inside of her. The only way to keep him from getting her children, she believed, was to kill them while they were still innocent" ("Opening Statements" A4).

Even while in prison, the press details Yates' mental instability, describing her status on "round the clock suicide watch" (Hutchinson 3) with "someone there watching her to make sure she doesn't harm herself" ("Jailhouse Visit" A1). This completes the narrative's element of Yates as a truly mentally incapacitated woman. Yates' first sentence of life imprisonment also shows many jury members were unable to cast Yates as a character of pure evil. While this sentence may appear very unsympathetic, it is important to remember that this ruling came in "notoriously tough Harris County, Texas,

where prosecutors have sent more defendants to their executions than in any other county in the United States” (“Life for Killer” A2). Yates’ second sentence of not guilty by reason of insanity, which allows her to remain in a state psychiatric facility, also shows the acceptance of the narrative of Yates as a mentally unstable mother, rather than an “evil mother” character (Lezon A1).

Andrea as a Victim of Postpartum Depression

The element of Yates as a “victim” (Falcone 14, “Kids’ Dad” A1) of postpartum depression also contributes to her unique narrative in the press, as compared to Smith and Routier, and perhaps constitutes a major reason why Yates’ narrative strikes many as the greatest “tragedy” of these three cases of filicide (“Kids’ Dad” A1, Shipp 31, “A Sad Farewell” A1, Della Cava D1, Kolker A2, Belli A1, “Rusty Yates’ Actions” A16, Nichols L14). Unlike the narratives of Smith and Routier, each of which mentions postpartum depression as a minimal possible factor in the narrative, every article studied regarding Andrea Yates contained at least a small discussion of this condition and its possible effects, as well as the controversy surrounding its status as a legitimate medical disease. Yates’ story “ignited a national debate over how mental illness and postpartum depressions are viewed in criminal courts” (“The Power” A1). Yates’ narrative “put a face on [the illness]” (Falcone 14) and details her struggle with “postpartum depression since the birth of her fourth child,” as well as her doctors’ attempts to cure her disease with several “prescription medications” (“Mother Allegedly” A2).

In bringing the issue of postpartum depression and psychosis to the forefront of America’s consciousness, the press coverage of Yates contained a legitimate medical explanation for Yates’ actions, allowing her narrative to contain somewhat of an

“excuse” (Styne 37, Russell G1) or something to “blame” (“Kids’ Dad” A1). While many of these journalists may have believed Yates deserved to be punished for her murderous crimes, their articles contain the idea that Yates never truly wanted her children to die: “Experts say these women [with postpartum depression] aren’t monsters, but victims of postpartum psychosis, a severe form of after-birth depression that can have devastating and sometimes deadly results...Mothers who succumb to PPD, most of whom are described as loving and kind mothers, can turn dark and homicidal” (Falcone 14)

The Narrative of the “Perfect Community”

The narrative of Andrea Yates, however, also contains several elements similar to those of both the narratives of Susan Smith and Darlie Routier; in many ways, Yates also fits the narrative of the “perfect mother” situated within the “perfect community”. While Yates was in fact the “perfect mother” before her encounter with mental illness, she also was surrounded by the “perfect”, loving community, despite the fact she did not know this community existed. During her gradual demise into the “evil mother” category, Yates’ community would have loved to help her cope with both her illness and the burden of responsibility of both her children and her housework. Yates’ neighbors expressed similar sentiments, wishing this mother had asked for their help: “I wish I had known something so I could have said ‘Let me watch your kids for a while. Let me do something.’ This is so awful. We just didn’t know” (“Mother Allegedly” A2); “It would have been nothing for me to go relieve her while she went shopping or just took a break” (“Kids Dad” A1).

After their murders, the Yates' community rallied around the memory of these children as "mourners left flowers and stuffed animals on [the Yates'] lawn" ("Bathtub Mom" A6), as well as "toys...balloons...gifts, cards, and white ribbons bearing the children's names" (Nazareno A1). A "congregation of strangers rallied to organize the children's funeral service" (Della Cava D1); "about 550 people attended [the funeral]" ("A Sad Farwell" A1). Even "the [responding] officers [were] pretty distraught" ("Mother Allegedly" A2). At the scene of the murders, "cops – some of them in tears – lead [Yates] away in handcuffs" ("Bathtub Mom" A6).

Russell Yates as the "Perfect Husband"

Andrea Yates' narrative also contains the element of the "perfect mother" as the sole childcare provider for her children; like the "perfect mother" in the mommy myth, Andrea Yates is completely responsible for both raising and protecting her children, without assistance from her husband, Russell. Despite her difficult situation, Andrea's inability to keep her family and herself together signifies her failure to complete the everyday tasks of the "perfect mother" character. While Yates' situation was certainly trying, no task is too great for the "perfect mother" when it comes to raising and protecting her children, even from the likes of Satan.

The lack of focus on Russell Yates' responsibility in the deaths of his children aligns with his role as the "perfect husband" in the "perfect mother" narrative. Neighbors told reporters "they didn't know the dad because he worked a lot of the time" ("Mother Allegedly" A2). This represents another characteristic of the "perfect husband", the husband as the breadwinner, responsible for the family's finances, not his children's upbringing or his wife's well-being. Russell Yates claimed he "didn't know" what his

wife was thinking, or that she struggling to take care of their children (“Rusty Yates” A3). Only one of the fifty-two articles studied questioned Russell Yates’ guilt in the deaths of his children. This article, entitled ““It Must Be Asked: Where Was the Dad? Difficult Questions Haunt Father of Drowned Children”, believes Russell Yates “missed the clues” of his wife’s mental instability, and asks, “Where was he when [doctors] took his wife off anti-psychosis medicine” (Della Cava D1)? Why did Russell Yates “leave a troubled wife home with the kids as he went off to work each day” (Della Cava D1)?

Despite its critical view of Russell Yates’ status as the “perfect husband”, the title of this piece undermines these questions. Why is it “difficult” to ask such questions of Russell Yates? The answer to this question lies in society’s expectations and definitions of a father and his obligations to both his wife and children. On the stand during the sentencing phase of Andrea Yates’ first trial, Andrea’s mother and brother both accused Russell “of not doing enough to prevent the mentally ill woman from drowning her five kids” and being “inattentive to his wife’s needs” (Mortiz 14). Andrea’s mother accused her son-in-law of “never changing a diaper after the birth of their fourth child” and poisoning her daughter’s brain with the beliefs of his religious “cult” (Mortiz 14). While these accusations may or may not be true, ultimately only Andrea received any punishment for the death of her children and Russell does not “bear any responsibility in his wife’s crimes” (“Rusty Yates” A3). No jury ever had the opportunity to determine if Russell Yates was “morally culpable” or “criminally responsible” for the crimes committed against his five children (DiManno A2).

“Mother” vs. “Woman”

Much like the press coverage of both Smith and Routier, the press’ choice of the terms “mother” or “woman” in the headlines of each article represents Yates’ position as the “perfect mother” who descended to the status of “evil mother” in her narrative. Immediately following the murder of the Yates’ children, when there was still a slim possibility of Yates’ innocence, the press refers to the accused as “mother”, refusing to take away her status as “perfect”, loving mother just yet: “Mother Allegedly Drowns Her 5 Kids” (“Mother Allegedly” A2), “Kids’ Dad Defends His Wife, Texas Mom Could Face Death in 5 Drownings” (“Kids’ Dad” A1). After her confession, the press cements Yates’ status as deviant and no longer deems her worthy of the title of “mother”, instead referring to Yates as “woman” or “wife”: “Drowned Kids’ Father Still Stands By His Wife” (“Drowned Kids” A6); “Jailhouse Visit; Stoic Dad Visits Wife in Jail; Family Talks with Woman Held in Drowning of 5 Kids” (“Jailhouse Visit” A1); “‘False Testimony’ Cited; Appeals Court Rejects Conviction of Yates; Prosecutors Will Ask For a Rehearing in Case of Woman who Drowned Her Children in the Tub” (Tilghman A1).

Articles that do refer to Yates with the term “mother” or “mom” do so for very specific reasons. Several articles couple the word “mother” with terms considered the antithesis of maternal, like “killer”, “madness”, “murder”, or “death sentence”, such as articles entitled, “Life For Killer Mom; Texas Jury Spares Yates from Lethal Injection” (“Life for Killer” A2), “Mother Who Drowned 5 Children in Tub Avoids a Death Sentence” (Yardley A1), “A Mother’s Madness; Reporter Recounts the Andrea Yates Child Murder Case” (Turner 18), “Texas Woman Kills Her Five Children: Mother Could Face Death Sentence After Drowning Young Family” (Borger A2), and “Bathtub Mom

Told Cops She Had to Chase Last Kid” (“Bathtub Mom” A6). One article referring to Yates as “mom” in its headline, “Hold the Lynch Mob for Texas Mom” (Shipp 31), does so because this journalist supports Yates, and attempts to portray this woman in a positive light; stripping her of the title “mother” would not accomplish this author’s goal nor sway the reader to also support Yates and view her as a sympathetic figure. The last article referring to Yates as “mom” in its headline does not fit any previously described category. This article, entitled “Texas Mom Maybe Be Pregnant, Five Children She Drowned Will Be Buried Today”, appeared after a rumor of Yates’ pregnancy leaked from the prison holding her before the trial (Hutchinson 3). Yates regained her title as “mom” from the press only temporarily due to this false information. This article shows the only way Yates would be able to recapture the name of “mother” would be if she was pregnant with a new child. She lost the right to be the “mother” of her other five children when she took their lives away.

CHAPTER NINE

IMPLICATIONS

The press coverage of these three women highlights society's narrow definition of "perfection" for mothers. This impossible standard, coupled with the low expectations for husbands in terms of parenting responsibilities, increases the level of stress in the lives of mothers striving to give their children the best care possible. Mothers are expected to always be control, even in chaotic situations, never needing assistance from others or a break away from their children. Mothers, in fact, are expected to have no breaking point, and thus society offers no support network for mothers to reach out to in times of struggle or need. One can only wonder what the outcome would have been for a mother like Andrea Yates, far past her breaking point, and in horrible need of help from her husband, her doctors, her family, and her community. If help had been available for Yates, her five children may still be alive today.

The perpetuation of this constricting definition of the "perfect mother" harms both mother and child. The lack of medical study and understanding of diseases like postpartum depression and psychosis, highlighted in the Andrea Yates case but also relevant to the narrative of Darlie Routier as well, illuminates the low social status of both women and mothers. Even the diagnosis of postpartum depression is influenced by our culture's myths about motherhood as the most wonderful and special time in a woman's life. In several other cultures, in fact, postpartum psychosis "is recognized as a mental illness and is used as a defense in court"; upwards of thirty countries take a mother's mental state into account after she murders her child ("Mother Allegedly

Drowns” A2). In Britain, for example, a mother who kills her own child within a year of giving birth cannot be charged with homicide (“Mother Allegedly Drowns” A2).

CONCLUSION

The print media perpetuates the “perfect mother narrative” to its audience, its readers, and society as a whole, who in turn readily accept this narrative which already perfectly aligns with their own long-held beliefs about, and expectations of, mothers. The narratives of Susan Smith, Darlie Routier, and Andrea Yates fit perfectly within this context. These women broke the maternal mold with their violent crimes against their children and shattered the dominant narrative of the “perfect mother”. The press’ condemnation of these women through its use of vivid imagery, strong language, and “evil” storylines cements their status in the eyes of the community as truly deviant women. This depiction represents a continuation of the dominant narrative restricting mothers into stereotypical caricatures of “perfect” or “evil”. Until our society can learn to lift such restrictions on mothers, women will remain repressed in terms of medical care, psychological care, and child care, as well as in their status both in society and in the courtroom. Though detestable and horrific, infanticide is a sad reality in our society today and it is important to examine its causes from all angles in order to put an end to such tragic and preventable violence.

WORKS CITED

- “Accused Mom.” Times-Picayune 27 June 1996: A17.
- Ackerman, Todd. “Postpartum Depression’s Role Doubted.” Houston Chronicle 21 June 2001: A19.
- Adrian, Juan E., Rosa A. Clemente, Lidon Villanueva, and Carolein Rieffe. “Parent-Child Picture-Book Reading, Mothers’ Mental State Language and Children’s Theory of Mind”. Journal of Child Language 32.3 (2005 August): 673-686.
- Barnett, Barbara. “Medea in the Media: Narrative and Myth in Newspaper Coverage of Women Who Kill Their Children.” Journalism 7.4 (2006): 411-432.
- Barnett, Barbara. “Perfect Mother or Artist of Obscenity? Narrative and Myth in the Qualitative Analysis of Press Coverage of the Andrea Yates Murders.” Journal of Communication Inquiry 29.1 (2005 January): 9-29.
- Bassin, Donna, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan. Representations of Motherhood. Yale University Press, 1994.
- Belli, Anne. “Progress is Seen in Yates; A Friend Says the Mother Hopes Some Good Came Out of ‘Tragedy.’” Houston Chronicle 9 January 2005: A1.
- Borger, Julian. “Texas Woman Kills Her Five Children: Mother Could Face Death Sentence After Drowning Young Family.” The Guardian 21 June 2001: 2.
- Bragg, Rick. “An Agonizing Search for Two Boys.” New York Times 28 October 1994: A22.
- Bragg, Rick. “Carolina Jury Rejects Execution For Woman Who Drowned Sons.” New York Times 29 July 1995: A1.

- Bragg, Rich. "Focus on Susan Smith's Lies and a Smile." New York Times 25 July 1995: A11.
- Bragg, Rick. "Police Say Woman Admits to Killings as Bodies of Two Children Are Found Inside Her Car." New York Times 4 November 1994: A1.
- Bragg, Rick. "Town Prays for Tots' Safe Return; Mom Yelled, 'I Love You All', as Thief Sped Away with Kids." Houston Chronicle 28 October 1994: A11.
- Brown. "Routier Planned Burglary Scam Before Murders". Associate Press 21 June 2002.
- Buzzanell, Patrice M., Rebecca Meisenbach, Robyn Remke, Meina Liu, Venessa Bowers, and Cindy Conn. "The Good *Working* Mother: Managerial Women's Sensemaking and Feelings About Work-Family Issues." Communication Studies 56.3 (2005 September): 261-285.
- Charisse. "Kids' Dad Defends his Wife Texas Mom Could Face Death in 5 Drownings." USA Today 22 June 2001: A1.
- Christian, Carol and Lisa Teachey. "Satanic Delusions Detailed; Doctor Testifies Yates Saved Kids From Hell." San Antonio Express-News 23 February 2002: C1.
- Christian, Carol and Lisa Teachey. "Yates Found Guilty; Jury Takes 3.5 Hours to Convict Mother in Children's Deaths." Houston Chronicle 13 March 2002: A1.
- Cimons, Marlene. "Menopause: Milestone or Misery? A Look at Media Messages to Our Mothers and Grandmothers." American Journalism 23.1 (2006): 63-94.
- Davis, Robert. "A Shocked S.C. Town Asks, 'Why?'" USA Today 4 November 1994: A3.

- Davis, Robert. "Another Day of Pain/Lead Proves Fruitless in S.C. Carjack." USA Today 3 November 1994: A1.
- Davis, Robert. "Search for Two Tots Shifts to Hometown." USA Today 31 October 1994: A3.
- Davis, Robert. "Town Feels 'Pain, Betrayal,' Outrage/ Attention Turns to S.C. Mother's Troubled Past." USA Today 7 November 1994: A3.
- Della Cava, Marco R., and Ann Oldenburg. "'It Must be Asked: Where was the Dad?' Difficult Questions Haunt Father of Drowned Children." USA Today 3 July 2001: D1.
- DiManno, Rosie. "Yates Ignored One Sure Voice in Killing Her Five Innocents." Toronto Star 18 March 2002: A2.
- Dobris, Catherine A. and Kim White-Mills. "A Feminist Analysis of the *What to Expect* Series." Women and Language 29.1: 26-42.
- Douglas, Susan J. and Meredith W. Michaels. The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.
- Eichel, Henry, Ken Garfield, Bruce Henderson, and David Perlmutter. "Mother Held in Deaths of 'Carjacked' Children; Warrant Says She Confessed; Boys' Bodies Found Inside Car in Lake." Pittsburg Post-Gazette 4 November 1994: A1.
- Endres, Thomas G. "Rhetorical Vision of Unmarried Mothers." Communication Quarterly 37.2 (1989 Spring): 134-150.
- Falcone, Lauren Beckham. "Deadly Birth Blues Put Face on Illness." Boston Herald 1 July 2001: 14.

- Fields, Gary and Robert Davis. "Police: Mom Killed Kids/Missing Car, Two Bodies Pulled From Lake." USA Today 4 November 1994: A1.
- Finkel, David. "Haunted Waters." Washington Post 25 June 1995: W10.
- Fisher, Walter R. "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument." Communication Monographs 51 (1984 March): 1 – 22.
- Fisher, Walter R. "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration." (1984): 348 – 360.
- Fisher, Walter R. "Toward A Logic of Good Reasons." Quarterly Journal of Speech 64 (1978): 376 – 384.
- Foust, Christina R. "A Return to Feminine Public Virtue: Judge Judy and the Myth of The Tough Mother." Women's Studies in Communication 27.3 (2004 Fall): 269-293.
- Gonzalez, John W. "Court Issues Arrest Order for Stenographer in Routier Trial." Houston Chronicle 2 April 1998: A24.
- Gonzalez, John W. "Diary Reveals Suicidal Routier Weeks Before Killings." Houston Chronicle 25 January 1997: A1.
- Gonzalez, John W. "Husband Says Routier Asleep During Attack." Houston Chronicle 28 January 1997: A1.
- Gonzalez, John W. "Jury Orders Death Penalty for Routier; 27-Year-Old Homemaker Shows Very Little Emotion." Houston Chronicle 5 February 1997: A1.
- Gonzalez, John W. "Prosecutor Says Frustration Led Routier to Kill." Houston Chronicle 7 January 1997: A1.
- Gonzalez, John W. "Routier Gave Baby Sitter Drugs, Humiliated Kids, Witnesses Say." Houston Chronicle 4 February 1997: A13.

Gonzalez, John W. "Routier's Behavior Not Typical for Grieving Mom, Nurses Say."

Houston Chronicle 10 January 1997: A34.

Gonzalez, John W. "Routier's Suicide Thoughts, Depression Over Money Woes

Described." Houston Chronicle 18 January 1997: A29.

Grant, Richard. "Motherhood and Murder." The Advertiser 25 March 1995.

Haines, Max. "Mommy Did It Susan Smith Sealed Her Two Little Boys Into Her Car

and Let it Roll Them to Their Deaths." Toronto Sun 24 October 1999: 22.

"Husband Testifies on Wife's Rigid Home Life." St. Petersburg Times 1 March 2002:

A16.

Hutchinson, Bill. "Texas Mom May Be Pregnant, Five Children She Drowned Will Be

Buried Today." New York Daily News 27 June 2001: A3.

"Jeers Greet Carolina Mother, For Safety, Suspect Will Be in Isolation." St. Louis

Post-Dispatch 5 November 1994: A1.

Johnson, Fern L. "Ideological Undercurrents in the Semantic Notion of 'Working

Mother'." Women and Language 24.2: 21-27.

Johnston, Deirdre D. and Debra H. Swanson. "Undermining Mothers: A Content

Analysis of the Representation of Mothers in Magazines." Mass Communication

& Society 6.3 (2003): 243-265.

Jones, Tamara. "Former Lover Says Smith Had Affair With Her Stepfather."

Washington Post 20 July 1995: A3.

Jones, Charisse. "Kids' Dad Defends His Wife, Texas Mom Could Face Death in 5

Drownings." USA Today 22 June 2001: A1.

Jones, Tamara. "Smith's Defense: 'She Snapped'; Mother of Drowned Boys Was Under Severe Strain, Lawyers Assert." Washington Post 19 July 1995: A8.

"Jury in Texas Convicts Woman of Killing Two Sons; She Blamed Slayings on Intruder at Home." St. Louis Post-Dispatch 2 February 1997: A1.

Kelly, Christine, and Michele Zak. "Narrativity and Professional Communication: Folktales and Community Meaning." Journal of Business and Communication 13.3 (1999 July): 297 – 313.

Kennedy, Helen and Bill Hutchingson. "Neighbor: Mom Was Crazy About Her Kids." Boston Herald 4 November 1994: 6.

Keown, Louise J, Lianne J. Woodward, and Jeff Field. "Language Development of Pre-School Children Born to Teenage Mothers." Infant and Child Development 10.3 (2001 September): 129-145.

Khanna, Roma. "Yates Divorce Finalized; The Settlement Gives Mother a Cemetery Plot Besides the Graves of Her Children." Houston Chronicle 18 March 2005: B1.

Kolker, Claudia. "Yates Gets Life Sentence for Slayings, Verdict Fuels Debate on Laws, Psychosis." Boston Globe 16 March 2002: A2.

Krum, Sharon. "Mother Faces Death Penalty/Woman Killed Sons Then Slashed Her Throat, Prosecutors Say." Daily Telegraph 4 February 1997: A20.

Langford, Terri. "As Yates' Retrial Nears, Her Ex Will Wed Again; Russell Yates Is Marrying Woman He Met in Church." Houston Chronicle 15 March 2006: B1.

Langford, Terri. "Rusty Yates' Actions Puzzle Acquaintance; He Wonders Why Andrea Yates' Ex-Husband Didn't Persist in Getting Her Medical Help." Houston Chronicle 19 March 2006: A16.

- Lee, Gary, and Barbara Vobejda. "In S. Carolina, an Angry Arraignment; Mob at Courthouse Jeers Woman Who Concocted Tale of Sons' Abduction." Washington Post 5 November 1994: A1.
- Lewis, William F. "Telling America's Story: Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency." Quarterly Journal of Speech 73 (1987): 280 – 302.
- Lezon, Dale, Peggy O'Hare, David Ellison, Melanie Markley, Rosanna Ruiz, and Armando Villafranca. "The Andrea Yates Case; Not Guilty, But Not Free; Insanity Ruling in Second Trial Sends Her to Institution; Loved Ones Call Decision 'Miracle,' While Prosecutors Are 'Disappointed'." Houston Chronicle 27 July 2006: A1.
- Lezon, Dale, and Peggy O'Hare. "Yates Again in Jury's Hands; Final Arguments Bring Her to Tears and Send the Slain Children's Father Fleeing Courtroom." Houston Chronicle 25 July 2006: A1.
- "Life For Killer Mom; Texas Jury Spares Yates From Lethal Injection." Toronto Sun 16 March 2002: 2.
- Livingstone, Sonia and Tamar Liebes. "Where Have All the Mothers Gone? Soap Opera's Replaying of the Oedipal Story." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 12 (1995): 155-175.
- Mehrtretter, Sara Ann. "The Inclusive Narrative: Bush's Rhetorical Strategy and the 2000 Presidential Debates."
- Meyers, Marian. "Crack Mothers in the News: A Narrative of Paternalistic Racism." Journal of Communication Inquiry 28.3 (2004 July): 194-216.

“Mom’s Boys Alive as Car Sank in Lake; Woman Held Without Bail.” Houston Chronicle 5 January 1994: A1.

Moore, Evan. “Convicted Child-Killer Mom Gains Varied, Vocal Support.” Houston Chronicle 20 January 2000: A1.

Moore, Evan. “No Tape for 53 Pages of Testimony; Routier Court Transcript Can’t Be Certified, New Trial Possible.” Houston Chronicle 29 January 2000: A29.

Mortiz, Owen. “Yates’ Mom, Brother Rip Kid Killer’s Hubby.” New York Daily News 19 March 2002: 14.

“Mother Allegedly Drowns Her 5 Kids.” Seattle Times 21 June 2001: A2.

“Mother in Texas Gets Death Sentence; Authorities Say Woman Staged Attack on Sons.” St. Louis Post-Dispatch 5 February 1997: A8.

“Mother Tells Authorities She Killed Her Two Children; Two Bodies Recovered From Car in Rural Lake.” Houston Chronicle 4 November 1994: A1.

“Mother to Remain in Jail.” Houston Chronicle 29 August 1996: A34.

“Mother’s Arrest in Sons’ Killings Has Texas Town in Disbelief.” New York Times 23 June 1996: A26.

Nathan, Debbie. “Unnatural Acts; A Look at the Aftermath of a Crime That Shocked the Nation.” Washington Post 25 January 2004: T05.

Nazareno, Analisa. “Houston Remembers the Kids; Yates Children are Recalled at Their Viewing Tuesday Night with Photos, Father’s Words.” San Antonio Express-News 27 June 2001: A1.

Nichols, Bruce. “Unrepentant in Yates Tragedy.” Toronto Star 20 April 2002: L14.

- O'Hanlon, Kevin. "Texas Cops Say Woman Killed Sons and Covered it Up." Chicago Sun-Times 20 June 1996: 19.
- O'Hare, Peggy, and Dale Lezon. "Friend: Yates 'Scary' Before Drownings; Defense Rests After Jury Hears How Defendant Had Neglected Hygiene and Stopped Eating." Houston Chronicle 12 July 2006: B4.
- "Opening Statements Heard in Yates' Retrial; Texas Woman Drowned Her Five Children in 2001, But Conviction Was Overturned." Baltimore Sun 27 June 2006: A4.
- Parker, Laura. "Mother-In-Law: Family Didn't Grasp Illness." USA Today 20 February 2002: A3.
- Parker, Laura. "Rusty Yates: 'Didn't Know She Was Psychotic'". USA Today 18 March 2002: A3.
- Parker, Laura. "The Power of an Expert Witness; These Women Killed Their Children. Juries Agreed When Psychiatrist Park Dietz Said One Was Insane and the Other Not. Now One Goes on Trial Again." USA Today 21 June 2006: A1.
- Penelope, Julia. Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers' Tongues. New York: Pergamon Press, 1990.
- Petraki, Eleni. "Disagreement and Opposition in Multigenerational Interviews with Greek-Australian Mothers and Daughters". Text 25.2 (2005): 269-303.
- Pisano, Marina. "Experts Say Postpartum Maladies Differ; Rare Psychosis is Much More Serious Than Just the 'Baby Blues.'" San Antonio Express-News 26 June 2001: B1.

- Plessow-Wolfson, Sabine, and Flavio Epstein. "The Experience of Story Reading: Deaf Children and Hearing Mothers' Interactions at Story Time". American Annals of The Deaf 67.4 (2005 Fall): 369-378.
- Pluhar, Erika, and Peter Kuriloff. "What Really Matters in Family Communication About Sexuality? A Qualitative Analysis of Affect and Style Among African American Mothers and Adolescent Daughters." Sex Education 4.3 (2004 November): (303-321).
- "Public Suspicion Focuses on Mother as Police Search For Boys." Houston Chronicle 30 October 1994: A10.
- Rakowsky, Judy. "Carjacking Mystery Stuns S.C. Community." Boston Globe 30 October 1994: A1.
- Rendon, Ruth. "A Sad Farewell; Yates Children Remembered in Services." Houston Chronicle 28 June 2001: A1.
- Rendon, Ruth. "Brother: Yates Thought Drownings 'Best Thing'; He Says He Sister Felt She Was a Bad Mom." Houston Chronicle 14 July 2001: A1.
- Rendon, Ruth. "Rusty Yates Seeks Divorce, Cites Discord; Move Comes Near Third Anniversary of Bathtub Drownings." Houston Chronicle 3 August 2004: A1.
- Roeper, Richard. "Susan Smith's Story Didn't Fool Anyone." Chicago Sun-Times 7 November 1994: 11.
- Roth, Elaine. "Momophobia: Incapacitated Mothers and Their Adult Children in 1990's Films." Quarterly Review of Film and Video 22 (2005): 189-202.

- Row, Meredith L., Barbara Alexander Pan, and David Coker. "A Comparison of Fathers' and Mothers' Talk to Toddlers in Low-Income Families." Social Development 13.2 (2004 April): 278-291.
- Russell, Jan Jarboe. "Post-Partum Depressions Doesn't Explain Andrea Yates." San Antonio Express-News 1 July 2001: G1.
- Schutze, Jim. "26 Year Old Held in Sons' Slayings; Mom's Story Full of Holes, Police Charge; Woman Would Not Assist Dying Child, Affidavit Says." Houston Chronicle 20 June 1996: A1.
- Sennot, Charles M. "In S.C., Fury Over Deaths; Coroner Says Two Boys Drowned." Boston Globe 5 November 1994: A1.
- Sennot, Charles M. "S.C. Tragedy Has Its Roots in Troubled Life; Abortion, Lost Lover Seen Spurring Mother's Actions." Boston Globe 6 November 1994.
- "Shaken Town Mourns Two Slain Boys." St. Louis Post-Dispatch 6 November 1994: A1.
- Shipp, E.R. "Hold the Lynch Mob For Texas Mom." Daily News 26 June 2001: 31.
- Siemaszko, Corky. "Bathtub Mom Told Cops She Had to Chase Last Kid." Daily News 22 June 2001: 6.
- Siemaszko, Corky. "Drowned Kids' Father Still Stands By His Wife." Daily News 22 June 2001: 6.
- Skibbe, Lori, Michelle Behnke, and Laura M. Justice. "Parental Scaffolding in Children's Phonological Awareness Skills: Interactions Between Mothers and Their Preschoolers With Language Difficulties." Communication Disorders Quarterly 25.4 (2004 Summer): 189-203.

- Smith, Susan and David. Interview with Charles Gibson. Good Morning America.
3 November 1994.
- Smith, Susan and David. Interview with Harry Smith. This Morning. CBS. 3
November 1994.
- Smith, Susan and David. Interview with Katie Couric. The Today Show. NBC. 3
November 1994.
- Steyn, Mark. "A Real Mother of Invention: Talk About a Killer Excuse: In Texas Case,
Postpartum Depression Has Become Just That." Chicago Sun-Times 1 July 2001:
37.
- Sutherland, Jane. "'Parenting' or 'Mothering'? The Case of Modern Childcare
Magazines." Discourse & Society 17.4 (2006): 503-527.
- Swigart, Jane. The Myth of the Bad Mother: The Emotional Realities of Mothering.
New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1991.
- Teachey, Lisa. "Most in Poll Prefer Prison to Death for Andrea Yates." Houston
Chronicle 14 November 2001: A23.
- Teachey, Lisa, Rosanna Ruiz, Ruth Rendon, Steve Brewer, and Mike Glenn. "Jailhouse
Visit; Stoic Dad Visits Wife in Jail; Family Talks with Woman Held in Drowning
of 5 Kids." Houston Chronicle 23 June 2001: A1.
- "Texas Woman Convicted In Murder of Sons." Washington Post 2 February 1997:
A25.
- "Texas Woman Is Convicted in Son's Death." New York Times 2 February 1997: A25.
- Thomas, Karen M. "Defendant's Image Makes, Breaks Case." Times-Picayune 22
December 1996: A2.

- Thurer, Shari L. The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother.
New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994.
- Tilghman, Andrew and Ruth Rendon. “‘False Testimony’ Cited; Appeals Court Rejects
Conviction of Yates; Prosecutors Will Ask For a Rehearing in Case of Woman
Who Drowned Her Children in the Tub.” Houston Chronicle 7 January 2005:
A1.
- Turner, Allan. “A Mother’s Madness; Reporter Recounts the Andrea Yates Child Murder
Case.” Houston Chronicle 1 February 2004: 18.
- Verhovek, Sam Howe. “Dallas Woman Is Sentenced To Death in Murder of Sons.” New
York Times 5 February 1997: A12.
- Vobejda, Barbara. “Anguished Town Says Goodbye to Young Victims.” Washington
Post 7 November 1994: A1.
- Vobejda, Barbara. “Officials Express Fears for Safety of Missing Boys; S. Carolina
Search Expands for Fleeing Carjacking Suspect.” Washington Post 30 October
1994: A3.
- Vobejda, Barbara and Gary Lee. “Before Boys Died, Woman Saw Her Life ‘Falling
Apart’; Hundreds Mourn Drowned Children in S. Carolina Town.” Washington
Post 6 November 1994: A3.
- “Woman Guilty of Son’s Death.” Pittsburg Post-Gazette 2 February 1997: A12.
- Yardley, Jim. “Mother Who Drowned 5 Children in Tub Avoids a Sentence of Death.”
New York Times 16 March 2002: A1.