

THE *CASTLE*/*NIKKI HEAT* PHENOMENON: A DETAILED EXAMINATION OF FEMALE
REPRESENTATION IN ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

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As entertainment reflects a culture's ideology, it is important for researchers to study its messages and subsequently its potential meanings. Entertainment has the power to inform and persuade, creating models for behavior with which the public interacts. The entertainment texts for the purpose of this study are the *Castle* television series and the *Nikki Heat* novels. Together, they create a unique multi-layer fictional world. By using postmodern, feminist, communication, and entertainment theories, the results of this study provide a tightly focused lens which views a narrow aspect of entertainment media. Each text was thoroughly examined using textual analysis, feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis, and conversation analysis. Contrary to expectations, the results indicated that the *Castle* and *Nikki Heat* texts support hegemonic ideology, particularly through the use of exaggerated stereotypes, strict gender roles, imagery, and narrative choices that help perpetuate rape culture. The discussion outlines how these results can be interpreted through the dominant messages presented in the texts. This research is intended to serve as a foundation for future research regarding entertainment media.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Studying entertainment media is important because of its natural tendency to persuade and propagate social roles and stereotypes. Moyer-Gus (2008) states, “because of its narrative structure, entertainment-education facilitates an emotional experience of being swept up into the narrative itself and becoming involved with the characters therein. This “involvement” may help to overcome various forms of resistance to persuasion” (p. 408). The persuasive element to which she refers is within the context of prosocial messages, but the narrative aspects create an opportunity to build parasocial relationships with televised characters, in turn normalizing certain depictions and behaviors in of themselves. Thus, this study seeks to explore a narrow aspect of depictions within a narrow aspect of entertainment media, specifically the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon. The overarching question guiding this process was: what key themes and messages are presented throughout the texts and what are the potential implications for female representation in entertainment media?

As an admitted fan of the television series and novels, I am already familiar with the content. The television show and novels are rich texts, full of opportunity to examine cultural ideology and societal expectations. My purpose was not to attack entertainment media, but rather to conduct a study that provides insight to the culture entertainment media helps to propagate. “Engagement with culture enables feminists to do ‘intellectual work that connects with the habits of being, forms of artistic expression, and aesthetics that inform the daily life of writers and scholars as well as a mass population’” (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 5). This research aims

to open a discussion on the recurrent use of specific types of language when describing a character, and how that language shapes the culture that consumes it. Or, as Altheide states, “the “cultural studies” approach seeks to examine the complex interaction between individual perspectives and patterns of meaning and symbolic ordering to understand new sources of social definitions and sort out their consequences” (1996, p. 11). By inspecting the content of *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels more closely, future researchers will have a tightly focused lens through which to view a narrow aspect of entertainment media and culture as a whole.

This cultural study aims to discuss the imagery, language, and actions that surround women in the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon. Using postmodern feminist theory, I attempt to deconstruct and understand what messages are conveyed by these artifacts from popular culture. Through this process, I explore the “hyperreality in which ‘the real’ and ‘the imaginary’ have become blurred” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 236). The texts, for the purpose of this study, will be the *Castle* television show and the *Nikki Heat* novels. Together, these texts create a layered fictional world in which the characters interact, further blurring the lines between reality and entertainment. Since there is an overabundance of material to draw from, a representative sample was used during the course of this study.

The *Castle/Nikki Heat* Phenomenon

Stereotypical tropes plague American pop culture creating racist, gendered, and narrow representations of widely diverse topics and audiences. In 1967, the National Citizens Committee on Broadcasting formed to lobby for the Public Broadcasting Act, which required networks to respond to viewer expectations. As a result the 1960s-’70s saw a shift in public activism through petitions-to-deny license renewal in efforts to change media content. The

National Organization for Women (NOW) filed many of these petitions in response to sexism in broadcasting, thereby “assert[ing] an intertwined relationship between media reform and feminist goals...propel[ing] the objectives of a broadcast reform movement aiming to expand public participation in broadcasting” (Perlman, 2007, pp. 416). Sexism in mass media is not a new occurrence; because of the representations in media, some groups gain privilege over others. Ebert (1988) says this is the function of the patriarchy—the “organization and division of practices and signification in culture in terms of gender and the privileging of one gender over the other” (pg. 19). A recent example of this division and signification is seen in the *Castle* television series and the accompanying *Nikki Heat* novels.

Castle first appeared as a mid-season replacement in 2009 and held a continuous presence in prime time until May 2016. (IMDb, 2015) The first *Nikki Heat* novel, *Heat Wave*, also appeared in 2009 on the tails of the first televised season (www.goodreads.com, 2015). Together, they create a layered fictional world with storylines that overlap and build upon each other. In this world, Richard “Rick” Castle is a successful fiction author, but he has hit a dry spell. His solution is to trail NYPD Detective Kate Beckett, using her life and experiences as creative inspiration for his new best-selling series starring Nikki Heat, a tough but sexy detective. In the televised series, Castle’s character experiences privilege as a result of his wealth, fame, and gender. During the first episode, Beckett protests Castle following her, but her captain brushes aside her request—regardless of her status as a successful detective, she is ordered to play hostess.

As the television show progresses, so do the novels, with similar crimes and relationships to the “real life” experiences of Beckett on television. There is only one notable

exception: in the novels, the character that represents Castle (Jameson Rook) begins a sexual relationship with Heat almost immediately, which does not take place in the *Castle* series until season 5. The relationship between the series and the novels is significant because a fictional male character is literally profiting from writing a narrative dictating a female character's life and choices, especially ones that she would not necessarily make for herself. There are even nods to this in *A Deadly Game* in which Beckett says, "She's naked on the cover again, isn't she?...That's great. No one's gonna make fun of me" (Bowman & Marlowe, 2010).

Both the televised series and the novels are mystery/crime tragicomedy (a play or in this case a television series/novels with elements of tragedy and comedy). Part of the appeal is the depth of the characters built through the two fictions working together. The relationships become more complex through the consumption of both media texts.

Interest in the series and novels is perpetuated beyond the stories told within the fictional world. A ghost writer is responsible for the novels themselves, yet ABC presents Richard Castle as a real person, even going so far as having Nathan Fillion (the actor playing Richard Castle in the televised series) appear at book signings in character. This marketing technique retains fans of the mystery genre by creating mystery around the book series itself. Ruesch writes that "The biggest mystery isn't in the plotlines of the books or the episodes. It's in who is actually writing the book" (romancingthetv.com, 2010). This further invests fans of the fiction; theories about the ghost writer's true identity abound online.

Because of the unique relationship between the two individual texts, and the unique relationship between the fictional male and female characters, the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon is unusually effective in acting as a host to parasocial relationships. Madison and

Porter (2016) discussed how the continuous presence of media in consumers' lives increases opportunities to build one-sided relationships with fictional characters, performing actions and imagining interactions with those characters whom they identify with. (pp. 360–364) During this process, audiences think about the characters and imagine their relationships outside of the viewing processes as part of a catharsis. *Castle*/the *Nikki Heat* novels provide this naturally; the narratives support and enrich each other, particularly through the sexual experiences of the literary characters. The parasocial aspect of this is exemplified by the fact that even after *Castle*'s cancellation, publishers have indicated that there will continue to be new *Nikki Heat* novels—effectually keeping the characters alive in media, and in the imagination of audiences.

Presenting the television drama as a reality with a fictional character as an author of the novels, while creative, may also be problematic for the female characters. As mentioned earlier, the narrative and language surrounding Beckett/Heat is told from the male perspective. This individual case represents larger issues within today's entertainment media and popular culture. "By producing the female subject as complemented and completed by her relation to a male partner, patriarchy *naturalizes* [emphasis in original] sexual identity, masking the cultural construction of the feminine, thereby continually reproducing women in a subordinate position (Ebert, 1988, pg. 19)."

Society categorizes and describes certain qualities embodied in 'male' and 'female' individuals. This organization serves a purpose: by according specific attributes to men and women, a hierarchical structure (whether consciously or purposely is irrelevant) is supported. Gender as a concept is different than physically or biologically presenting as male or female, which itself has a range. Instead, gender is culturally constructed and propagated by intentional

differences. These manifest as blue and pink clothing for infants, spatial separation and relegation, and social structures supporting specific roles based on gender. By creating differences, the assumption according to Derrida is that there is inherently a measurement, and therefore an oppositional power struggle. "The person in the dominant position always serves as the referent. The question is whether women are equal to, the same as, or different from men, and thus deficient" (Hare-Mustin, 2004, pp. 20-21). These cultural constructs taught from infancy are socially learned behaviors that are usually met with negative reinforcement when individuals do not adhere to them. And in a society where the de facto level of measurement is male, men experience the luxury of the dominant group: privilege. (See Hare-Mustin, 2004; Ebert, 1988; de Beauvoir, 1968; etc.)

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Feminism and Postmodern Thought

RQ1: How do the *Castle/Nikki Heat* narratives represent femininity and masculinity and how have these narratives evolved throughout the series?

Feminism and gender are linked. Where gender has been considered a binary, it has been utilized by the feminist movement to describe the differences between men and women in social, economic, and political settings. However, through queer theory, gender as a binary has been deconstructed and now, along with sex, is seen as a social construct. “The interactional dimension of social structure is where cultural expectations attach to the categories of femininity/masculinity and then are applied to, and expressed by, sexed bodies” (Budgeon, 2013, pg. 319). Budgeon (2013) explains that because an idealized version of masculinity and femininity is at work during social interactions, gender inherently plays a part in construction of self and the categorization of each individual within a social structure. As such, gender is directly involved within the same interactions and processes that develop and maintain a patriarchal society.

The history of feminism in the United States is complex, fragmented, and contains a considerable amount of disagreement. Opinions vary on dates and significant events; as such, different sources will recount the political feminist movement in different ways. Perhaps the most common (and easiest to conceptualize) is the wave metaphor, although there are serious issues created by utilizing it. Referring to the feminist movement in waves creates division. Each wave indicates points in history during which middle-class white women were predominantly

active in the political movement, ignoring the social, political, ideological, and economic contributions of women of color, trans individuals, and others (Laughlin et al., 2010, pp. 76-81). Furthermore, who has the authority to decide the beginning and end, and what qualifies as relevant and of interest? As an alternative, Iris van der Tuin (2007) explains the metaphor of waves as descriptive of the rising and falling activity within feminism as a whole, “continuously in motion, waves have neither an end nor a beginning...there is continuity and discontinuity” (pp. 10-11).

When discussing feminism, three distinct waves are generally understood. The first two waves are largely agreed upon by academics in regards to their time frame and goals. In response to criticisms of feminism being “a predominantly white, heterosexual standpoint,” which ignored the lived experiences and hardships of women of color, of differing genders, and of lower socio-economic status, the third wave naturally blossomed (Cocca, 2014, pg. 98). Despite popular culture and news organizations occasionally stating that feminism has died, active feminists worked to create a more inclusive feminism.

Rebecca Walker is credited with coining the term “third wave” in 1992. Her frustration with the lack of acceptance for women’s experiences, especially those experiences of women of color or for non-heterosexuals was exemplified in her article *Becoming the Third Wave* (pg. 39). With a new generation and technological advances, the third wave spurred new acceptance of intersectionality and the unique lived experiences and oppressions experienced by individuals with more than one intersecting identity. “Grounded in protest to the conservative politics of the 1980s and 1990s, the Third Wave strives to be antiessentialist and nonjudgmental...This embrace of the messiness and complexities of lived experience includes not only openness to

continua of race, gender, and sexuality but also the reclamation of signs of femininity as empowering” (Cocca, 2014, pg. 98). This new wave spread ideas of slur reclamation, sex positivity, girlie feminism, and a women’s movement that does not need to be a mass organized operation—instead each individual creates their own movement with their daily interactions. Because the third wave is more loosely defined, it is harder to pinpoint in history exactly where it falls (see Valenti, 2014, pg. 173; Cocca, 2014, pg. 98; Baumgardner, 2011, pp. 17-23). Operating under the assumption that the third wave has a beginning, some feminists argue that it has an ending as well (in 2010 approximately).

According to Baumgardner (2011, pp. 248-252) a fourth wave is blossoming, overlapping third wave political beliefs and historical existence, but including new forms of online activism, trans-feminism, and supportive community. Baumgardner estimates the fourth wave began in 2008 overlapping the third wave, characterized by access to all, for all. Even if not labeled as a new wave, Valenti praises the online activism of the new feminists—“it’s the realization of the old feminist adage “the personal is political.” The most important component of my work and what I get involved in lies in its accessibility” (2014, pg. 180). Feminism is alive and well, but looks different than it did 20 years ago. Rather than experience an online presence as a learning curve, these feminists are online natives. Social networking sites and apps have made it possible for online feminists to find new outlets for sharing their views and spreading awareness.

Closely tied to the intersectionality of the third wave and loose parameters of online feminism, postmodern and poststructuralist thought embrace polysemy. Postmodernism and

poststructuralism have subtle differences in meaning and foundation. Stable provides a succinct comparison of both postmodernism and poststructuralism:

Central to the postmodernist understanding of society is the belief that the "grand," or totalizing, principles of modernity and the Enlightenment—including appeals to rationality, progress, humanity, justice, and even the ability to represent reality—have been fatally undermined. This line of reasoning emerges from poststructuralist critiques of language, subjectivity, and representation; but where poststructuralism refers to theory, postmodernism is the practice. In other words, where poststructuralists criticized the foundations of modernism, postmodernists read these critiques as mandates for rejecting foundations altogether. (1995, pg. 89)

Poststructuralism critically deconstructs the axioms of liberal humanism, creating a dialogue in which the simple dichotomy is disregarded (Shaefer, 2014, pg. 374). It allows for an ongoing construction of 'self'. (There are differences of opinion in regard to how this affects feminist agency. See Clegg, 2006, pp. 309-324.) Essentially, a completely postmodern self is "a fragmented, disjointed, and discontinuous mode of experience...a fundamental characteristic of postmodern culture...[and] media culture [is] the site of [its] implosion" (Kellner, 1995, pp.233–234).

Where poststructuralism creates the possibility of a world without dichotomy, postmodern feminism actualizes this possibility by employing subjectivity as a form of knowing. The "real" is seen as an existing social arrangement created by patriarchal society (Ebert, 1988, pp. 22-24). For example, previous thought centering around the symbolic "woman" as an entity falls short of the postmodern feminist identity because as a signifier, "woman" is part of the language created by men as described by Lacan. (See sections *Gender Roles and Negotiating Power* and *Feminist Textual Analysis* for further discussion on the role language plays in sexism.) The postmodern feminist embraces the fluidity of feminism, gender and truth in that

there will be different lived experiences, understandings, and interactions based on individuals and situations.

Castle and the *Nikki Heat* novels are both examples of postmodern texts; depending on the individual reading the text, there will be differing interpretations of intended messages. Additionally, these texts are an unusual example of postmodernism because of the multi-layered fictional world. The characters in *Castle* are aware of and at times interact based on the characters in the novels, which differs significantly from traditional adaptations (the “real” characters on the television show may change attitudes and behaviors because of actions made by their fictional selves). This structure changes and adapts throughout both series, further removing it from the “traditional” forms of adaptation and storytelling.

The Importance of Studying Entertainment Media

RQ2: How does the multiplatform fictional reality convey notions of womanhood, identity, and authority?

How did gendered representations happen? What caused hyper-sexualized, limiting, or uninformed ridiculous images of women and gender to become so abundant in media? The answer is simple, but a complex issue to address. “Privilege keeps your privilege invisible. The dominant group does not define itself with respect to its group or order. Thus men do not refer to masculine status, they do not add “as a man” when speaking. But women speak “as a woman.” Specifying “as a woman” reserves generality for men” (Hare-Mustin, 2004, pg. 16). Essentially, because of privilege and its limited view, patterns of thinking and representation emerged. Studying entertainment media allows scholars to explore one of the ways in which privilege is created and perpetuated.

Feminist scholars are faced with a dilemma when critically studying film: feminist politics call for anti-elitism, but feminist film theory “rejects conventional discourse as phallogentric and calls for the construction of an entirely new cinematic language” (Michel, 1990, pg. 240). Enacting this process excludes voices outside the narrow confines of this academia, while continuing to use the pre-set language to describe the experience limits the understanding of that experience. It is in negative or limiting portrayals, whether intentionally so or not, lies the importance of feminist film and television analysis. Feminist film theory was developed in tandem with the second wave feminist movements of the 1970s. During this time, the content of the text being studied was not considered as important as the acquired meaning of that content. “It was given that film should not be regarded as a *reflection* of meaning given in advance, but as a *construction* of meaning” (emphasis in original, Smelik, 2007, pg. 180).

The construction of a culturally accepted set of ideas and beliefs surrounding what someone or something should look like supports privilege. In a society where generality is reserved for masculine males, sexism in entertainment is serious. Since the 1970s, NOW and other women’s rights groups have included entertainment reformation within their agenda as a direct result (Perlman, 2007, p. 414). NOW’s petitions claim that the representation of women in media directly influenced the sexism and discrimination women faced in daily life (Perlman, 2007, p. 413). Freud postured that eroticism begins with the gaze; film theorists built upon this by stating that viewing film is inherently a voyeuristic action. Berger concludes that this the dominant ideology in Western media culture because “men act and women appear, or rather: men look and women are looked at.” This was seen commonly throughout the 1930s-60s, and even in recent films such as *Sliver* (1993) and *True Lies* (1994). This gaze has been developed

and entered the “real world” through trends in body image and the objectification of sub-cultures (Smelik, 2007, pg. 180).

The 1970s brought with them the powerful female heroine, and in her wake were the unattainable and physically impossible beauty standards (Smelik, 2007, pp. 180-182). Traube’s (1992) analysis of 1980s film led her to the conclusion that classism heavily influenced content and created a fear of women leaving traditional familial roles. “Gender and family issues posed a special challenge for [the] movie industry...In an era characterized by mounting antifeminism, widespread nostalgia for traditional family forms...and a continuing struggle for gender equality [made] attracting the widest possible audience no simple matter” (p. 53). Female representation in animated films targeted for young audiences are no better. Disney has undergone a process of rebranding their princesses, encouraging young children to identify with one of the princesses and thus buy related merchandising. But the films themselves (especially true of the early Disney princess films) contain troubling “consistent portrayals of meaningful gendered patterns...[and] may contribute to the social scripts the viewer creates when exposed to gender-stereotyped content” (England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek, 2011, pg. 556). For example, *Snow White* (1938) stays home cooking and cleaning for seven men, while *Princess Tiana* (2009) is “career oriented...prevent[ing] her from socializing and pursuing romantic opportunities” (England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek, 2011, pg. 563). The disturbing result: even in children’s media there is a fear of women leaving traditional gender roles.

In popular literature, gender boundaries were shaken as early as 1868 with the arrival of Jo March in *Little Women*. This presentation of the “tomboy” as an alternative to rigid gender roles made it possible for women readers to imagine something other than giddily accepting

stay-at-home life (hoogland, 2007, p. 103). Now young readers have access to a plethora of “strong women” to idealize, with the popularization of characters like Hermione Granger (*Harry Potter* series), Katniss Everdeen (*The Hunger Games* trilogy), and Beatrice “Tris” Prior (*Divergent* trilogy). However, their popularization does not mean that these characters are any better at representing women, and instead may encourage new stereotypes (see Firestone, 2014; Burke, 1973).

This understanding begs further questioning of what images are predominantly conveyed. Through these popular culture images audiences glean a society’s culture, and perhaps more ominously, that culture’s ideology. Ideology is defined as a set of beliefs that guide said culture, informing levels of value and forming the very foundation of society (Grinner, 2004, pp. 198-203). In American cinema, women, among other groups, have been symbolically annihilated through fewer portrayals and opportunities. This symbolic annihilation is compounded by Othering, as defined by Lacan, in which women are systematically “deprived of images and meanings to affirm their own pursuits, to differentiate themselves from time-honored maternal scripts, or to be more masculine if they so choose” (Byerly, 2007, pg. 226). Furthermore, Gerbner found the longer an audience spends interacting with something or someone, the more they will come to define their understanding of reality by that thing or person. Gerbner was concerned with political agenda setting on television. He found “heavy viewers of television are more apprehensive, anxious, and mistrustful of others than light viewers in the same age, sex, and educational groups,” essentially creating a new “synthetic consciousness” informed by their viewing habits (1977, 2013, pg. 149).

Gender Roles and Negotiating Power

RQ3: How is power and powerlessness negotiated in the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon?

Gendered representations in media have been making consistent shifts toward challenging norms over recent decades. Yet in many current television series and films, there is a heteronormative, white, able-bodied, and affluent framework of assumption. These assumptions indicate culturally significant desired outcomes. Lacan's work can be simplified to indicate that women are inherently subordinate and lacking through language and absence. It follows that Hollywood representations, regardless of point of view, stand to serve male audiences (Mellencamp, 1995, pp. 108-112, 137-143). Bandura posits that those representations ultimately inform audiences as models of behavior with which to interact (Bandura, 1971, p. 3).

As audiences are internalizing messages, they subconsciously begin to categorize. Indeed, it is within human nature to want to label and define those things with which we interact. Lunceford gives the example of naming types of steaks—some names are arbitrary, others reflect the anatomical areas of the animal—but this desire to categorize becomes problematic when considering cultural taboos. He argues that the words themselves result in an easier dismissal of the real issues: female sexuality and misogyny (2013, pp. 405-406). Language creates meaning and culture, allowing communication and understanding between individuals within a given social context. Therefore, descriptive language holds great significance: it defines the status quo.

When images and texts begin presenting a consistent image or a consistent approach to an issue, patterns become stereotypes. In media, those patterns stand to influence consumers.

For example, the over-used and ridiculous patterns of behavior surrounding gay men in popular media. The initial image that a reader may conceive will likely be white, flamboyant, interested in fashion or talking with a lisp. It is obviously not an accurate image of all gay men, but rather a generalization and caricature of an entire group composed of a limited number of qualities. This stereotyping empowers discrimination and false assumptions subtly through media consumption. "Members of a culture learn implicitly about the rules, norm, and power structures of their cultures. In other words, the media are one of the places where people learn about their culture's ideology" (Rockler-Gladen, 2004, pg. 192).

A stereotype isn't always going to be necessarily bad. In television and film, stereotypes are a necessary plot device in order to tell the narrative arc. "Nuances, convolutions, and contradictions energize the art...The simplified systems of stereotype are often useful in that they facilitate understanding, especially by the lay adult audience and youths. Without understanding, the message is completely lost" (Savage, 2015, *Uses of Stereotype in Art and Film* section, para. 3). Without these stereotypes, writers would have to spend excessive amounts of time explaining the scene. So in this regard, a universal understanding of an individual stereotype or a common narrative arc is a benefit.

Historically, women have been inaccurately portrayed, had their personal and professional options limited, and been perceived as inferior. Hegemony of a male dominated industry (Hollywood) has influence over what stereotypes are perpetuated. In the early 1900s, women were influential players in Hollywood, but over the years that influence has slipped. Between the years 1949-1979 only 14 of the 7,332 movies produced in America were directed by women. "Between 1985 and 1995, the number of films directed by women skyrocketed to

16 percent from nearly zero...and that was the highest it ever got” (Ogilvie, 2015, para. 45). (And as it happens, *Castle’s* creator, lead producer, and main writer is a man, Andrew Marlowe.) The consequences of having fewer women working in the creative and production processes is seen in the final product. Even something as simple as paying closer “attention to women’s faces, voices, and bodies rather than their stands on issues, their achievements or their authority, trivializes them and strips them of power” (Everbach, 2013, p. 15). The resulting sexism is reflected in the individual’s expectations upon interacting with another individual with whom they are unfamiliar (Frieze, 1978, pg. 444).

Gender roles influence negotiations of power. One method of studying how this process works, feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (FPDA), pays special attention to language describing, defining, and narrating the female perspective. This method of discourse analysis was developed by Judith Baxter in the context of a classroom ethnography, yet the principles still apply when analyzing a fictional scripted conversation. FPDA is defined as “*feminist* [emphasis added in original] approach to analyzing the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in the world according to the ways they are located by interwoven discourses” (Baxter, 2004, p. 295). Baxter argues that FPDA allows the researcher to inspect small-scale interaction and thus provides potential to create localized improvements and transformation.

FPDA distinguishes itself by inspecting specific ways power is exchanged through discourse, one being the collaborative models on which conversations are built (models on which individuals are taught to interact socially). This includes listening skills, support, and successful exchanging ideas. During a discourse, if all individuals are in agreement, this supports

the dominant idea. However, if some individuals do not agree, the process of challenging and becoming dominant in the conversation may be influenced by societal norms. (Baxter, 2004, pp. 295-301; Baxter, 2008, pp. 243-255; Frost and Elichaooff, 2014, pp. 49-51) “The feminist perspective on poststructuralist discourse analysis considers gender differentiation to be a dominant discourse among competing discourses when analyzing all types of text. FPDA regards gender differentiation as one of the most pervasive discourses across many cultures in terms of its systematic power to discriminate between human beings according to their gender and sexuality” (Baxter, 2008, pp. 243-255). This dominance of language, consistent support of the status quo, creates the cues on which cultural ideologies and normative thinking are built.

Sexism in media’s effects are not limited to media, following the logic of Bandura and Gerbner. Its reach goes far beyond the immediate reception and consumption of content. Women’s place as subservient is reflected in their images, the manner in which they speak, and the message conveyed about them. “Questions about the ways language—in structure, content, and daily usage—reflect and help constitute sexism were foundational for studies in social psychology on gender and language” (Weatherall, 2015, pp. 410-426). And even in these fields, sexism limits findings through researcher bias (Weisstein, 1971, pg. 68-83). Since media is pervasive in American culture, and if images and language are a reflection of the society’s social psychology, it then stands to reason that media and language directly affect women’s power in any given situation.

Feminist Textual Analysis

RQ 4: How does contextual framing influence the discourse between characters in the televised fictional setting versus the literary fictional setting?

The idea that not all individuals will experience the consumption of media in the same ways goes without saying. Part of that influence includes the individual's prior experiences, shaped by how that individual identifies and how they interact with their surroundings. Within feminism, ideas of intersectionality emerged as a response from women of color defining their lived experiences; their definition of feminism included issues of race, class, gender, and other threats to their equal opportunities (Samuels and Ross-Sheritt, 2008, pp. 5-6). For example, Crenshaw (1991) described how previous attempts to politicize sexism or racism had failed the woman of color because both attempts had addressed only one experience or the other. In her study on battered and raped women of color, she found that although there were resources for battered women, those resources did not consider the unique obstacles that women of color experience because of their dual identities. Crenshaw's idea applies to any number of intersecting identities that an individual may have, and influences how that individual experiences every day interactions. This causes considerable problems for individuals who belong to more than one oppressed group—the racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism, etc. that they experience is compounded by their intersecting identities. (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1241–1250)

Using the concept of intersectionality during research attempts to address “gaps in academic literature” by using multiple analytical lenses reflecting the multifaceted issues being studied (Encyclopedia of Gender and Society, 2009). So, it stands to reason that just as black feminists experienced racism, sexism, and classism simultaneously throughout the 1960s and 70s (and even now), interpreting any text through only one of those lenses will inadequately describe the issue. “Consequently, scholars must attend to myriad overlapping and mutually

reinforcing oppressions that many women face in addition to gender. It is no longer acceptable to produce analyses that are embedded solely within an essentialist or universal collective experience as “woman” (Samuels and Ross-Sheritt, 2008, pp. 5-6). Simone de Beauvoir drew attention to this issue as a lack of solidarity, citing that women removed themselves from the “We” and instead aligned themselves with the men of their racial, ethnic, or status (de Beauvoir, 1968, pp. xix-xxv). Yet, it is in the distinctions, the differences, that each individual creates and understands the world around them.

Language defines the world around us; language allows us to understand the individual within a historical and social context. Thus, the language used to describe something or someone is extremely significant. For example, the signifier “wo-man” acknowledges that man is the dominant, with women subordinate. The male perspective in this is the norm, with the female representing the Other. “To ignore the signifier is to make reference the sole process of meaning, and to miss the crucial role played by the signifier in articulating and shaping signification” (Furman, 1980, pp. 46-48). When conducting a feminist textual analysis, it is paramount that attention be given to language describing, defining, and narrating the female perspective. Since “knowledge is made by people, and not found, textual feminism implies a recognition of the fact that we speak, read, and write from a gender-marked place within our social and cultural context” (Furman, 1980, p. 48). Here, it is useful to define textual analysis within context to this research. A textual analysis makes educated interpretations about the meaning of content. “We interpret texts in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them”

(McKee, 2003, pg. 2). This creates greater understanding of the text being studied, the culture within which it takes place, and allows for greater self-reflection regarding our own practices.

Within a text, in this case *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels, conversations between characters allow for further conversation analysis. Conversation analysis depends on an ethnomethodological view “in which people are understood not simply as victims of an all-powerful social order but also as agents actively engaged in methodical and sanctioned procedures for producing or resisting, colluding with or transgressing, the taken-for-granted social world” (Kitzinger, 2000, pg. 168). By speaking, characters are engaging in a society and using language to create and define knowledge. By analyzing these conversations and the text where they occur, a more thorough understanding of the cultural ideology can be produced.

These differences are the basis on which negotiated meanings are built. Reception studies were first introduced by Stuart Hall in 1973; he believed that researchers should focus on the political and social context of a text, and the every-day life context of the consumption of that text. (Hall, 1980) He explained that texts and signs are polysemic, and could be legitimately interpreted in different ways. In application, negotiation of meaning is “understood in accord with intentionality, subject-formation, and historical conditions” (Murphy, 2005, pg. 168). Essentially, the preferred reading as intended by the manufacturer of the message may differ from the negotiated (or even oppositional) decoding of that same message. As *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels are postmodern and polysemic texts, the preferred reading is legitimately debatable. Incidentally, preferred readings often are reductionistic of complex ideas and individuals. Ter Bogt et al. (2010) stated that the “formulaic portrayal of gender roles and sexuality, is developing and sustaining stereotypical gender-role schemas; for example, ideas

that, for women, looks and sexiness are all important and, for men, sexual obsession is normal, and sexual prowess an asset” (pg. 844). These typical roles extend beyond sexism and intersect with racism, classism, ageism, etc. and it is essential that scholars continue to study how these roles shape society.

This extension of Othering women with different identities limits understanding and cripples movements toward gender equality. Online and in entertainment media, there are those that maintain gender equality has been achieved (simply Google “I don’t need feminism”) for a variety of reasons. However one interprets this, adults and children still experience highly structured and gendered environments in the home, workplace, socially, and in popular culture. Even with societal improvements and concentrated efforts to change these practices, “children are being raised in ways that differ significantly from past generations...but shifts in the traditional gender roles [are] slight, at best, with children displaying fairly conservative gender orientations” (Adler et al., 1992, p. 171).

Worth, Augoustinos, and Hastie (2015) state “the claim that gender equality has been achieved appears premature, however, in light of statistics which demonstrate that economic, professional and social disadvantage still exists for women relative to men” (pg. 54). Lehman’s work further supports this finding, explaining that popular television dramas represent the middle-class white experience as the norm. “Television programs depict working women in a way that downplays their career ambitions. Characters are shown in the home more often than the workplace, and they seamlessly blend work and family life—in contrast to real-life women’s struggle to combine the two roles” (2013, p. 224).

These recurring images and language used to describe women on television (and in other popular media) serve to create a cultural ideology. For example, a “Cinderella” is the ideal woman who has beauty and can easily defeat the Other women in pursuit of the man. Kramer stated that “the ideological discourse for women is based upon economic social power relationships which work to keep women in submissive roles” (as found in Cupaiuolo, 2004, p. 209). Keeping with the fairy tale, it is not Prince Charming who creates problems; rather, it is limiting the female experience to what the prince decides for her future (Mellencamp, 1995, pp. 1-8). Because certainly, “no emotional, professional or political accomplishment can be possibly compared with the twin vocations of beauty and marriage” (Kramer, 2004, pg. 209; as found in Pozner, 2004).

This framework of expectations forms what is called a “master narrative” for the female in storytelling. A master narrative “forms a collective of stories that are implicit or embedded in a culture or group” (Maines, 2001, pg. 176). “Acting as paradigms, master narratives...help us make sense, but at the same time we use them, they limit us” (Russ, 2004, pg. 214). But what happens when an individual voice is discontent with the master narrative?

The short answer is that they are dismissed. Women who respond to sexism are “liked less” and are deemed “complainers” by male perceivers. “These findings demonstrate the social cost for women who confront the prejudice they face and help elucidate why the overwhelming response of women who experience sexism is not to confront the perpetrator” (Worth, Augoustinos, & Hastie, 2015, pg. 55).

Of course, there are a number of women and men in the entertainment industry creating new texts regularly. But even they cannot “ensure fundamental change or equality of

opportunity” (Erens, 1990, pg. xv). And with changes to popular media in response to consumer pressure, there has been an emergence of stronger adult female characters. These characters provide opportunity for consumers to see other women refuse victim status. This refusal is an act of “repudiating our programmed submissive behaviors” and a reclamation of power and agency (Talbot, 2005, pg. 167).

What’s Next?

Reviewing existing literature illuminated a hole in previous academic discourse. While there were many books, articles, and reference materials on various aspects of this study, none were found that address these distinct issues represented by the fictional world created in the *Castle* television series and the *Nikki Heat* novels. The purpose of this study is to address the preferred reading of entertainment media, specifically its representation of womanhood, within the frame of this selected text. Secondly, this study seeks to examine the text more holistically than previous case studies by incorporating both forms of the text—the television series and the novels inspired by the television series. Finally, this study will suggest potential social consequences of these representations in entertainment media, and include recommendations for improving those representations, along with recommendations for further study.

A prior reading of *Castle* has discussed a reversal of gender roles in television. Jessica Gaffney’s 2011 thesis work “Evolving Gender Hybridity in the Crime Solving Partnerships of ‘Bones’ and ‘Castle’” addresses some of gender-role changes seen throughout recent decades. Through a brief textual analysis Gaffney describes professional behaviors, physical traits, emotional interactions, and the social connections exemplified in *Bones* and *Castle*. Her analysis does not appear to be thorough and her methods for selecting relevant scenes/episodes are

not present. Even so she draws grand conclusions: “the lead women in *Bones* and *Castle* are more goal-oriented and career-focused than their male counterparts. Both Brennan and Beckett are characterized by a strong physical presence, helping to equalize them especially in the eyes of their male peers and contributing to the loyalty and trust inherent in their partnerships (Gaffney, 2011, pg. 33).” She goes on to explain “female characters may change or re-adapt, innately feminine mysteries puzzle and intrigue their male counterparts, creating a sexual tension which makes the partnership more dynamic” (pg. 34).

Gaffney’s conclusions indicate that she has only considered a gender binary (although she discusses the characters adopting traits stereotypically associated with the opposite gender, she does not address that these qualities are not inherently male or female and may present across all genders). Perhaps more alarmingly she defines the successful female character in terms of their male counterpart. These female characters are not considered strong, independent, or competent because they are the best in their field (in each respective television drama the lead female characters in *Bones* and *Castle* have extremely successful careers), rather they are these things because their male partners do not *always* represent those same qualities (Gaffney, 2011).

Gaffney’s work is useful in that it describes the changing structure of television dramas, including breaking away from the stereotypical gender representations of the 1980s and 1990s. But that does not preclude the implementation of new stereotypes or lingering elements of old ones.

There are still many questions to be answered regarding fictional entertainment interacting on multiple platforms. Similar to the fanfictions of beloved science fiction hits like

Star Wars, *Star Trek*, and *Firefly*, the *Nikki Heat* novels further develop their televised counterparts. Black (2006) has defined fanfiction as “writing in which fans use media narratives and pop cultural icons as inspiration for creating their own texts. In such texts, fan authors imaginatively extend the original plotline or timeline... create new characters... and/or develop new relationships between characters that are already present in the original source” (p. 172). These fanfictions take on a variety of forms including comics, graphic novels, novels, drawings, blogs, etc., all with the purpose of answering the unanswered and fulfilling audience needs. While fanfiction provides a platform for active audience interaction and the cultural construction of new negotiated meanings, it is rarely accepted as part of the source material canon. (Black, 2006, pp. 172-173) Because of the similar characters and plot development the *Nikki Heat* novels fulfill some of the same audience needs. However, these novels are officially sanctioned entertainment literature, play a role in the televised series development, and even play host to the ABC logo on each novel’s cover.

Studying entertainment media is an important aspect of understanding of cultural ideology. When considered through a feminist lens, studying entertainment is vital to gain insight (and therefore to have the tools to enact change) about the social construction of gender, femininity, power, and identity. Because entertainment media is influential, this study seeks to answer an overarching question: what key themes and messages are presented throughout the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon and what are the potential implications for female representation in entertainment media? To this end, this study will consider a very narrow aspect of entertainment media, the *Castle* television series and the *Nikki Heat* novels. These four questions will guide the research:

RQ1: How do the *Castle/Nikki Heat* narratives represent femininity and masculinity and how have these narratives evolved throughout the series?

RQ2: How does the multiplatform fictional reality convey notions of womanhood, identity, and authority?

RQ3: How is power and powerlessness negotiated in the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon?

RQ 4: How does contextual framing influence the discourse between characters in the televised fictional setting versus the literary fictional setting?

By conducting a textual analysis of *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels this research hopes to explore how entertainment media creates these visual and literary representations. (The conditions of how this will be accomplished are detailed in the Methodology section.) Special attention will be given to examples of female agency, contextual framing, and negotiations of femininity. In-depth examples of each will be provided, accompanied by personal interpretations and other possible interpretations. In an effort to remain as thorough as possible, repeated references to the literature and prior studies will be visited.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Statement of Positionality

When the first episode of *Castle* aired, I was 16 years old. I was already a fan of the murder mystery genre—I had been watching *Diagnosis Murder*, *CSI*, *Law and Order*, and *Bones* with my mother for years. These shows were a way for us spend time together in the evenings, trying to figure out “who done it” before the end of the episode. It was always a race to beat each other. So when we sat down to watch the first episode of *Castle*, “Flowers for Your Grave,” there were some expectations. I already knew how to watch a murder mystery drama: first there will be clues, rising action and tension, a red herring, and finally a grand conclusion.

But *Castle* was different. Each episode followed the basic rules, but the story telling was fun. It was sexy and full of witty tongue-in-cheek humor. Detective Kate Beckett, the lead female character, was smart and tough. She was compassionate, confident, and didn’t have time for nonsense. Beckett had brains, yet she still had a gorgeous guy falling over himself to be with her. She was everything I aspired to be at sixteen. After watching the first season, I decided I wanted to go by “Kate” too.

So when I say I am a fan of the show, I mean it wholeheartedly. But watching *Castle* now leaves me questioning the show’s purpose. The characters I loved have changed. The drama feels soapy. And upon closer look, the characters were never as perfect as I imagined them initially. That is why I am drawn to this study: to investigate the entertainment that shaped my world views. I still enjoy murder mysteries and *Castle* will always have a special place in my

memory. But I believe it is important to be aware of influence, especially when it could negatively impact my understanding of the world around me.

To accomplish this larger goal, I have narrowed my area of focus to the language and narratives surrounding female characters in the televised series and accompanying novels. These specific aspects of entertainment media are important to study because they enter into popular culture, and subsequently common ways to describe the world around us (in this narrow aspect, the way women are represented). I will be conducting my research from a feminist perspective, and as such my opinions and personal experience will be included.

I entered the research with considerable familiarity with these media texts. I consider myself a fan of the series and the novels, although I am not active in the online communities and my appreciation for the series has depreciated as the series has continued. I also consider myself a feminist, and identify most closely with third wave politics. As a feminist, I believe it is important to closely consider the things we love and resist the temptation to blindly follow hegemonic ideology. This research's purpose was to explore and identify the language and images used to describe and narrate female characters' lives, and to discuss what those descriptions could be interpreted to mean.

In my personal life and as a researcher, I operate under a feminist construction of reality, and believe that knowledge and truth are created together subjectively. Therefore, my research will be an iterative process, returning to the literature, the texts, and feminist and communication theories regularly. As a heterosexual, white, and young woman, my research perspective is influenced by my lived experiences. I will attempt to denote any instances in which my perspective influences my conclusions. However, as a feminist researcher, I do not

believe including my perspective alongside my findings dilutes them, rather it empowers them. My lived experiences informs and shapes that knowledge (see Naples and Gurr, 2014, p. 27).

A Brief Overview of the Research Process

Castle and the *Nikki Heat* novels both depend on an overarching narrative encompassing smaller subplots. A first reading included a general review of the representative sample of both texts to ensure familiarity with the narrative. The results include a short overview of the series' and novels' narratives. To create a succinct but accurate description of the content, I then conducted a detailed textual analysis to the representative sample of both. While collecting the data, I analyzed the content, searching for emerging themes and patterns. After collecting themes, the results were stated and followed by a discussion. The sample is outlined as follows.

Defining the Sample Text: *Castle*

The *Castle* television series aired from 2009-2016 with eight seasons total, with each season containing approximately 22-25 episodes. Season one was the sole exception, with only 10 episodes. The individual seasons have their own overarching narratives that tie the individual episodes together. In order to perform a more detailed textual analysis, the first season and season seven were viewed in their entirety as a representative sample. These specific seasons were selected for hardcopy availability (so that pausing, re-watching, and air times would not be concerns) and so that the introduction of characters would be captured. Since these seasons were viewed in their entirety, the sample is still quite large and contained larger narrative arcs. Additionally, the narrative time between the two seasons allows for a

better understanding of how the characters were initially portrayed in contrast with their established selves.

Procedurally, the data collection and analysis from *Castle* required an initial reading to gather first impressions and a close secondary reading. As part of the initial viewing, they were watched in their entirety, to ensure familiarity with the narrative. During the secondary reading notes were made concerning the interaction between characters, characters and their surroundings, the dialogue, and the language surrounding character descriptions. Additional attention was given to the body language and physical appearance of the characters. The notes include direct quotes, which episode the information is from, time stamps, and notation of acts and scenes from which the data is gathered. Each episode was also classified as “passing” or “failing” the Bechdel Test. After each episode, I took time to pause and reflect on my notes. During this process I began initial coding, including literal codes and analytical codes (see Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, pp. 308–315). After initial coding, I constructed a memo for each episode to serve as a reference for further analysis and as a resource for future researchers. Throughout this process the research questions served as a guide and I returned to the literature as necessary.

Defining the Sample Text: The *Nikki Heat* Novels

The *Nikki Heat* novels have been widely successful, each with multiple editions and stints on the New York Times bestseller list. There are currently seven books in print, although the publishers have indicated there will be more *Nikki Heat* novels to come. Each novel contains elements similar to the televised season immediately preceding it, with characters and events reflecting similarities. (The novels were inspired by the television series.) The characters in the

television show are aware of their literary counterparts. In order to perform a more detailed textual analysis, *Heat Wave* and *Driving Heat* (books one and seven respectively) were read and analyzed in their entirety as a representative sample of the series of novels. These specific novels were chosen for hardcopy availability (so that note taking and highlighting would not be a concern), for the introduction and establishment of the characters, and so that the novels selected would counterpart the seasons selected. Since these novels were analyzed in their entirety, the sample is still quite large and contained larger narrative arcs. Additionally, the narrative time between the two books allowed for a better understanding of how the characters were initially portrayed in contrast with their established selves. The copies of *Heat Wave* and *Driving Heat* that will be used for analysis are both hardcover first editions, printed in the United States.

Procedurally, the data collection and analysis from *Heat Wave* and *Driving Heat* required an initial reading to gather first impressions and a close secondary reading. As part of the initial reading, both novels were read in their entirety, to ensure familiarity with the narrative. During the secondary reading notes were made concerning the interaction between characters, characters and their surroundings, the dialogue, and the language surrounding character descriptions. The notes include direct quotes, impressions, and descriptions along with chapters and page numbers. This is intended to allow future researchers to return to the text with ease. At the conclusion of each chapter I took time to pause and reflect. During this process I began initial coding, including literal codes and analytical codes (see Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, pp. 308–315). After initial coding, I constructed a memo for each chapter to serve

as a reference for further analysis, and as a resource for future research. Throughout this process, the research questions served as a guide and I returned to the literature as necessary.

Emergent Themes and Analysis

After the process of initial coding was completed for the sample seasons and sample books, the memos and codes were consolidated into emergent themes respectively. These themes were then used as points for further analysis in relation to the research questions in the discussion section. The analysis is supported by feminist and communication theories. Finally, a comparative analysis was performed of both texts side by side, searching for patterns and meaning characterized by language and context. In especially significant instances (including outliers and how those instances should be taken into consideration) both texts were compared directly for greater understanding and clarity. By studying these texts and their themes, an image of the dominant cultural ideology perpetuated appeared. The process of performing a cultural study on entertainment media helps to illuminate how power and hegemonic ideology are embedded within the text through the use of language (See Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 237).

The results section contains purely the results of this study. They are organized by the emergent themes. The *Castle* and *Nikki Heat* novels' results are presented separately for ease of understanding to provide clarity for the reader. For organizational purposes, a theme outline was created for both texts, and has been included in the appendices for future reference (See Appendix A and Appendix B for each text's thematic outlines).

Framing the Discussion

The discussion was written upon completing all analysis, both individually and comparatively. It includes my interpretation of the emergent themes, the analysis, and references to the literature. As a postmodern feminist researcher, this section inherently includes my perspective. There are also personal interpretations of intended meanings and potential societal consequences surrounding the representations contained within entertainment media. As a researcher, I have done my best to denote where my perspective is limited, and support my opinions with feminist and communication theory. For organizational purposes, the themes in the discussion are presented in relation to the research question they correlate with. This is intended to provide clarity for the reader and for future research. A color coded outline of themes according to subject matter and the research questions is included in Appendix C. At the conclusion of this study there are recommendations for future researchers interested in the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon and its relation to popular culture.

Remarks on Research Validity

Research validity was achieved through a process of triangulation across different elements of the study. The research itself is based upon multiple types of data from a very large data set. The results and discussion consider “confirming and disconfirming evidence and contrary interpretations” (Creswell, 2013, p.204). The methods include detailed textual analysis, deconstruction, and FPDA. The findings and discussion are supported by feminist, communication, entertainment, and postmodern theories. Most importantly, this is feminist research and includes Lather’s four frames of validation through the exploration of language (and the “truth” it propagates), ideological frameworks, multiple interpretations of potential

meaning, and a discussion including my own opinion in an effort to explain “more than one can know and to write toward what one does not understand” (Creswell, 2013, p. 205).

Throughout this entire process, I have returned to the literature. The complexity of these themes combined with my limited frame of reference necessitated further study continuously.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Through the process of a detailed textual analysis, patterns and themes began to appear. This section outlines the results of this study as they emerged. The data set itself was quite large, even though only a representative sample was used. Because of that fact, the results are organized separately, according to the text in which they were found. This approach was chosen to aid the reader; with such a complex narrative and multilayer fiction, it was deemed appropriate to organize information first according to how it is presented in the original texts. (The results are presented in relationship to the research questions they answer in the discussion section.) The results for *Castle* are presented first because *Castle* was the original text. The *Nikki Heat* novels' results are presented second because the novels were inspired by the television show, and therefore the content overlaps. For added clarification, a thematic outline for each text can be found in the appendices (See Appendix A and Appendix B for complete outlines).

Narrative Overview of the *Castle* Television Series

Before detailing the results of this study, it will be useful to the reader to have a brief overview of the *Castle* television series as a reference. As this study's representative sample includes seasons one and seven, this overview will focus on a narrative overview of those seasons only, including the minimum plot information necessary from other seasons.

Season 1 of *Castle* opens with the introduction of Richard Castle, a wildly successful murder mystery novelist. He has just ended a series of novels because he was no longer inspired by his main character, reflecting his constant need to be entertained. Simultaneously,

Detective Kate Beckett has just entered a crime scene that possess an eerily similar configuration to one of Castle's novels. Kate is serious, smart, and full of biting wit. Her investigation leads her to Rick and as a result, Rick decides he has found the inspiration for his new series of novels. By pulling strings with New York PD's higher authorities, Rick is granted permission to follow Kate through her investigations. Kate is irritated by this arrangement initially, but eventually comes to depend on Rick's input to solve cases. Kate is secretly a fan of Rick's novels.

As season 1 progresses, Kate and Rick become increasingly attracted. Although their relationship is a professional one, humor arises as the pair begins to feel an intense sexual attraction. Supporting characters begin to notice this attraction, to which Rick freely admits, but Kate staunchly denies. Kate is intentionally distant and private with most people, but Rick is able to read her easily (most of the time), which makes her uncomfortable. Rick is a celebrity and a playboy, but he is so taken with Kate that he devotes most of his energy toward trying to impress her.

Rick frequently disregards personal and professional boundaries; one such personal boundary is Kate's mother. After she expressly states that he is not to investigate her mother's murder, Rick does so anyway. Kate feels so strongly about this infringement on her privacy that she threatens to end their unusual partnership at the conclusion of season 1. Much of season 1 (and the subsequent seasons) is devoted to understanding Kate's motivations and emotions as a character.

In the following seasons, Kate and Rick have highs and lows within their professional and personal relationships. Rick's new series of novels is a huge success; Kate solves her

mother's murder (and many other murders as well, all with Rick's aid). The pair finally can no longer resist each other and begins a sexual relationship at the conclusion of season four. Eventually, they are engaged and intend to marry at the conclusion of season six. The supporting characters also experience personal and professional growth, helping move the narrative forward. Throughout seasons one through six, the cast remains relatively unchanged with few new additions. The sole major exception is the replacement of Captain Montgomery by Captain Gates in season four, episode one.

Season seven of *Castle* opens with a recap of the previous season's finale—the couple's marriage ceremony is interrupted by a phone call indicating Rick has been in a serious car crash. Kate rushes to the scene, still wearing her wedding dress, and begins to investigate. Rick is missing for two months before the couple are reunited. Kate and Rick desperately try to pick up the pieces of their relationship, but they are only successful after Rick has an epiphany about how much better both of their lives' are because of their relationship. After a quick wedding Rick and Kate fight crime together with a renewed purpose.

In their professional lives, both characters see growth; however, Kate begins to vastly outshine Rick. Kate is recruited to run for state senator and aces her captain's exam; she is faced with a choice to pursue one career option or the other. Kate's professional achievements are met with outside resistance from political authorities. The couple's personal life makes a noticeable shift after their marriage. They officially move in together only after marriage and almost immediately begin discussing children (privately as a couple and with comments from supporting characters). Kate is increasingly referred to as an extension of Rick. This season as a

whole focuses on the personal growth and understanding of Rick's character much more heavily than Kate's.

Representations of Femininity in the *Castle* Television Series

Physical Imagery

The opening scene of the *Castle* pilot episode includes close angle shots of a nude female corpse. Then viewers watch as Richard Castle signs a fan's breast at a raucous rooftop party. Finally, viewers meet a severe looking Kate Beckett as she quips with her friend Lanie Parish that romance is dead—to which Lanie retorts, wearing lipstick would help (Bowman & Marlowe, 2009). The choice to focus on the physical appearance of female bodies in the first segment of the first episode sets a tone for the rest series. Of the many aspects that create an individual's femininity, the physical representations are often the easiest to identify. In *Castle*, those representations are mostly of stereotypically attractive women.

Detective Kate Beckett, played by Stana Katic throughout the series, is a tall and thin white woman. Her facial features and expressions are one of the reasons that Richard decides he wants to shadow her—he finds she has “gorgeous eyes (Bowman & Marlowe, 2009).” Frequently Beckett displays a high level of physical fitness—she runs and apprehends suspects with ease, even showing the ability to physically overpower individuals that are much larger than herself.

In the first season, Beckett has short hair and she wears relatively modest business casual clothing. Her appearance steadily shifts from moderately practical to an unsaid joke—as the series progresses, Beckett's attire and makeup become increasingly more extravagant and unrealistic for police work. She wears spike heels, high boots, body-forming and restrictive

blouses, and almost exclusively tight pants. The unlikelihood of a real woman being able to perform her duties as a detective in such attire is eventually part of the narrative humor in *Dead from New York*. A guest star asks Beckett "How do you fight crime and keep your hair like that? And do it in high heels?" (Szwarc & Marlowe, 2015).

Other supporting female characters also present stereotypical (and somewhat diverse) images. Martha Rodgers (played by Susan Sullivan) and Alexis Castle (played by Molly C. Quinn) are Richard Castle's mother and daughter, respectively, within the television series. Both women are tall, thin, and white. As part of the narrative, they are both wealthy and as such are seen in expensive and fashionable attire. They are both described as beautiful as part of the narrative, and both have extremely bright red hair. Lanie Parish (played by Tamala Jones) is Kate's best friend and an exceptionally talented medical examiner. She is a busty black woman, usually seen wearing scrubs that are tight and she always wears bright makeup. Captain Victoria Gates (played by Penny Johnson Jerald) is presented as a strong business woman, exclusively wearing suit dresses and pants suits and minimal makeup. Both Lanie and Gates have relaxed hairstyles and are never seen with natural hair.

Female guest stars in *Castle* are diverse in all manners of physical appearance and attire. However, they are usually represented in stereotypical ways. Physically attractive, wealthy, and white women typically are not suspects in the investigations and rarely represent the culprit, but they will be presented as the victims. Conversely, women of color, lower economic status, or stereotypically unattractive women are victims, suspects, or criminals.

Femininity and Personality Traits

Physical appearance, however, does not solely encompass femininity. The narrative of the *Castle* television series describes and shows examples of ideal femininity through personality and emotions (which in this series is shown almost exclusively through heterosexual women). These representations rely heavily on stereotypical gender roles in interpersonal relationships.

Women in *Castle* display a tendency to “mother” the individuals around them. In some situations this appears naturally—the interactions between Rick and Martha in season seven after Rick has been found adrift, for example. Yet at other times this tendency seems exaggerated; Alexis frequently takes care of the adults in her life. In season one (her character is supposed to be fifteen at this point in the narrative) Alexis takes care to protect the feelings of Martha and Rick, she is the only voice of reason in the household, and she cooks and cleans for them both. In *Child’s Play*, this is further exaggerated to the point it becomes humorous, when Alexis places a tracking app on Rick’s phone so she can know his whereabouts (Bowman & Marlowe, 2014). Beckett also is seen mothering those around her at times—she scolds her squad for not reading at a crime scene, she swats things out of Rick’s hands at work, and she takes care to protect the emotions of victims and even some criminals. In one episode, Kate is seen literally mothering an infant that has been the center of an investigation. Because Martha does not overtly display such tendencies, she is often the recipient of rude/disrespectful comments from Rick about her parenting style.

Closely tied to their motherly nature, the women in *Castle* are almost constantly frustrated, scolding, or angry—and those feelings are usually directed at a man. For Kate, this is

a continuous state a being. From the first episode she is annoyed with Rick, which rises and falls depending on the scenario, but is present through season seven. These emotions are a core part of Kate and Rick's personal and professional relationships, and are presented as increasingly flirtatious. In *Little Girl Lost* Kate is "grumpy" because she has seen the cover art for the first Nikki Heat novel, which depicts a female silhouette naked; Rick ignores Kate's comments about the image being demeaning to focus on a new opportunity to tease her for her interest (Terlesky & Marlowe, 2009). She also scolds or is irritated with her squad often, but this results in an atmosphere of camaraderie, presenting Kate as "one of the boys" and her frustration merely as a side effect. This pattern creates an image of nagging women or women being the source of negative emotions depending on the scenario—as though the role of the feminine individual is to provide conflict. Through the narrative progression, Kate's emotional displays begin to shift to a less irritable base level, but this tendency still remains. The friction between Kate and Rick (or Kate and her squad, or Kate and a suspect) is often the source of humor for the episode. As this shift occurs, episodes also shift their tone to a less light-hearted nature. Alexis and Lanie will also experience sudden outbursts of anger, but these are very limited and appear within reasonable situations.

There are a few cases of women being presented as "hysterical" in light of a situation. In season one a notable example occurs in *Little Girl Lost* during the mother's confession to hiding her daughter because she hates her husband (Terlesky & Marlowe, 2009). In *Clear & Present Danger*, an ex-girlfriend commits murder because of her break-up with her boyfriend (Woods & Marlowe, 2014). Both of these cases exemplify women who have committed crimes as a result of uncontrolled emotions and anger toward a man. However, this level of emotion is also

displayed by Kate when she believes Rick has been kidnapped in *Driven* (Bowman & Marlowe, 2014). Throughout this episode, Kate is panicked and aggressive, relies heavily on her squad to carry her emotionally, and nearly faints as the evidence is discovered. The episode brings Kate's emotional level back down during a private moment between Rick and Kate; she confesses how she "freaked out," and as a result, he comforts her.

Femininity is also indicated by displays of jealousy and similar emotions in *Castle*. In season one, Kate begins to express jealousy in *Home is where the Heart Stops* when she attends a social event and sees there are many women present that have attempted to impress Rick (White & Marlowe, 2009). She becomes territorial and mocking with Rick in an attempt to downplay her own feelings. Audiences see how possessive Kate is over her relationship with Rick, something that she apparently has not been aware of previously. After the romantic relationship between Kate and Rick has been fully established, moments of jealousy between the couple are used for narrative humor. In *Child's Play*, Kate stands off with a seven-year-old girl over the attention Rick has been giving the child as part of the investigation. Another instance occurs in *Hong Kong Hustle*, when Kate meets a female cop that appears to have it all, which makes Kate feel insecure about her own achievements to the point where she stumbles through her investigation. The humor comes from an "I told you so" moment during which Rick exasperatedly explains that Kate is comparing herself to a false image and that she should not have spent time with the other cop.

The insecurity that Kate feels is closely tied with a judgmental personality, which is seen in every female character at some point. Kate's displays are consistently an extension of her investigation—she decides the motives and trustworthiness of the individuals she is interacting

with. However, her assumptions about other people are not always limited to strictly professional assessments. For example, in *Hell Hath No Fury*, Kate is accusatory and openly hostile to a prostitute, believing in her own superiority. Her choice to belittle the prostitute and disregard the woman's feelings indicates that Kate perceives the prostitute as deserving of her disrespect (slut shaming the prostitute in essence).

Other women show displays of cattiness; Martha and Alexis both do little to hide their disliking for Rick's ex-wife, finding her annoying and unintelligent. (In *The Time of our Lives*, Martha directly compares the blondes Rick has dated to horses.) Lanie openly ridicules Kate for some of the clothing she owns in *Home is Where the Heart Stops*, implying that the outfits have an influence over how Kate is perceived. This focus on the body image of women being tied to their personal interactions is further exemplified in *A Death in the Family*, when Kate shows contempt for a woman who has had plastic surgery and when Martha tells Alexis she is "hideous" in a certain color of dress. This representation of femininity is not limited to the central characters and is shown periodically through guest characters. The consistency with which these personality elements are shown to represent female characters indicate that these characteristics are more firmly associated with femininity.

As stated earlier, the sexuality of the female characters in *Castle* is almost exclusively heterosexual. Even when considering characters that appear in a single episode, there are almost no representations outside of the perceived heteronormative ideal. The sole notable exception takes place in *The Wrong Stuff*, when Kate learns that a female suspect wanted a divorce from her husband because she fell in love with another woman—a fact that is never

explicitly stated, but instead indicated with a head nod. (There are a multitude of possible interpretations for this choice in the narrative.)

Within the context of heterosexual femininity, the women of *Castle* represent extremely robust sexual appetites. While season one primarily focuses on building sexual tension between the two main characters, Martha is outgoing and vocal about her physical desires. (A point that is frequently the subject of derision from Rick, which also holds much to be interpreted.) In season seven, however, Kate and Rick experience a very active sex life, which is frequently the focus of the overarching narrative. It is also heavily implied that Lanie and Detective Javier Esposito (played by Jon Huertas) are enjoying a healthy sex life, Alexis is now pursuing men for physical relationships, and Martha is continuing to date multiple men.

Female Power and Dominance

Female power and dominance are often represented in *Castle* as an extension of the woman's femininity. Although there are instances of women using masculine approaches to gain power or maintain dominance, the female characters usually utilize more feminine approaches. With the exception of Kate's use of physical violence, the female characters of *Castle* are much more feminine than masculine during their interpersonal interactions. When a female character is seen behaving in a masculine manner it is usually used as comedic material (the same applying to the male characters when they behave in stereotypically feminine ways). The tendency to use reversed stereotypes as humor will be addressed later in more detail.

As mentioned earlier, the women in *Castle* fit stereotypical ideals for attractiveness. In some instances the women will use this quality to their advantage and utilize their physical appearance and body language as a tool to control the outcome of a situation. For example,

Kate frequently uses her body language to distract Rick; in *Flowers for Your Grave*, Kate leans close and whispers to Rick seductively, petting his ego, using his shock to trick him into doing what she wants. She also uses this tactic when interrogating suspects—by physically placing her body in the line of sight and then using her movements to distract the individual. Examples of this tactic are seen in *Hedge Fund Homeboys* and *Ghosts* in season one, and again in *Resurrection* and *The Wrong Stuff* in season seven. Similarly, Lanie uses her body language to seduce Esposito and persuade him to lie for her in *Bad Santa* in season seven.

Kate is the only female character who consistently uses physical violence or aggression to control a situation. This is represented as a positive quality and one of the reasons Rick finds her appealing (she is presented as unusual or uniquely physically capable). Examples of Kate using her body to physically overpower a male suspect are seen in *Flowers for Your Grave*, *Hell hath no Fury*, *Driven*, and *Dead from New York*. During the few encounters with female suspects, Kate does not shy away from physical aggression. In *Clear & Present Danger* Kate struggles with the suspect twice, but both times she needs Rick's assistance. However, in *Reckoning*, Kate faces an extremely dangerous woman and brutally kills her with her bare hands, indicating that Kate possess considerable strength and resilience. This act shows that Kate is capable of asserting her dominance to any end.

Instances of female characters using language and manipulation to assert their position or to gain power are abundant in *Castle*. This presentation of power and dominance is shown through use of tone, threats, lying, emotional manipulation, and bossy attitudes. Although each tactic is different, they are all used with the same purpose—to control the outcome. Kate's character uses these strategies in most of her interpersonal interactions. She heavily relies on

tone, lying, and emotional manipulation when interrogating suspects; in *Meme Is Murder*, Kate utilizes all of these approaches in one scene as she interrogates the murderer (Roe & Marlowe, 2014). However, these approaches do not always work, as one squad member states, “A control freak like you with something you can’t control? No that’s gonna be more fun than Shark Week” (Bowman & Marlowe, 2009). Other characters use these strategies as well. Gates is frequently portrayed as bossy, although it is natural that she should be telling the others what to do since she is their precinct commander. Lanie and Alexis both use their tone and threats to achieve their goals. Martha rarely exhibits control of situations, but when she does, she uses her tone or lying to achieve dominance. Even female suspects will be shown using these tactics periodically.

There are interesting combinations of all the previously mentioned language tactics used by the main female characters in *Castle*. Particularly in season one, Kate exerts her dominance over her squad with a bossy attitude and her tone, but this is frequently used to show her as “one of the guys.” Additionally, Kate is seen using threats as a way to flirt with Rick in almost every episode. Sometimes the threats are physical, sometimes they are poking fun at Rick’s masculinity in a public manner, but regardless, the outcome is always the same: Kate achieves dominance in their personal relationship through her aggression. However the female character achieves her goals, in *Castle* it is most frequently associated with one of these displays of stereotypically feminine tactics.

Even with so many representations of strong female lead characters in positions of power, these same characters also are seen displaying power in name only. Within the narrative, Kate Beckett is the lead homicide detective for her NYPD precinct, and as such is in

charge of a squad made up of two male detectives. Yet, frequently her squad members will take the lead and make decisions on their own. Similarly, when Captain Gates replaces Captain Montgomery, she takes over the role of precinct commander. Gates, however, is easily circumvented by Kate, the squad, and by Rick whenever it suits them. One extreme example of power being stripped from a woman occurs in *Hollander's Woods*, when Kate undergoes a fake performance review. She is verbally attacked for faults in her leadership and professional abilities. Although she defends herself vehemently (using some of the tactics before mentioned) the encounter closes with the revelation that the whole scenario was simply a test of her character, leaving her without power in the situation.

Representations of Masculinity in the *Castle* Television Series

Physical Imagery

Where *Castle* gives a noticeable amount of attention to the female body, it neglects the male body almost as noticeably. The main male characters of the series all have a stereotypically attractive physique (with the exception of Captain Roy Montgomery played by Ruben Santiago-Hudson who is presented as fatherly rather than attractive). However, their physicality is almost never addressed directly. In *Always Buy Retail*, Rick makes a point of admiring how handsome he is, and again in *Hollander's Woods*. In both instances, these comments are humorous nods to Rick's ego. Rick is consistently referred to as a playboy, good-looking, and a celebrity, further enhancing the idea that he is to be accepted as an attractive individual, but these attributions are made in passing and not the focus of the scene.

Detectives Kevin Ryan (played by Seamus Dever) and Javier Esposito are the only other male characters that appear in all episodes of *Castle*. Both men represent traditionally accepted

ideals physically, while also representing an element of diversity within the television series. Ryan's character is Irish Catholic, shorter, and very trim. He is always seen wearing suits and ties, and usually remains very serious. Esposito is Hispanic, tall and muscular, and usually is seen wearing clothing that accentuates his build. His character typically is much more physically active and as a result he represents the ideal masculinity. It is an unstated fact that all the men of this series are strong, good looking, and well-dressed, unless they are a suspect.

Masculinity and Personality Traits

In contrast to the neglected physical attention, *Castle* often explores ideas of traditional masculinity through its male characters. Although the female characters will occasionally display traditionally masculine actions, the delineation between "acceptable" types of behavior for male characters is much more firm. The actions and interests of the male characters represents traditional ideals of masculinity; any actions they take outside of the stereotypical norm is represented through humor.

As mentioned, there are instances where a male character's ego is presented within the narrative. For Rick, these moments are represented as loveable faults or humorous. In *Home Is Where the Heart Stops* Rick uses his wealth and celebrity as an opportunity to show off—he achieves this by getting tickets to a black-tie event for himself and Kate. Rick makes a show of explaining how Kate should dress at the precinct, only to secretly have ordered an evening gown for her and have it shipped to her apartment. Kate is embarrassed and furious at his arrogance, only to stop mid-thought because she is so astounded by the gown's beauty, impressed by his choice. Later in the same episode, Rick makes comments indicating that it would be a blow to his ego if he had to participate in a charity event date night with another

man. (The interaction also indicates how hyper-masculinity has influenced male-to-male interactions and the acceptable practice of homophobic remarks.) Rick consistently looks to outside sources to boost his ego, including women and men, but only in situations that are non-threatening to his image of masculinity.

Detectives Ryan and Esposito both display considerable pride within aspects of their lives. Ryan's pride in his responsibility to his family is the focus of a running series of jokes—in season one he is accused of being “whipped” and later in season seven he takes on a second job to ensure he has enough money set aside for his daughter's college tuition. Esposito uses the opportunity to make fun of Ryan's job as a security officer saying a rent-a-cop uniform would make him more attractive. (Riley & Marlowe, 2014) Esposito's ego is mostly built upon his ability to attract attention, especially from women. Examples are seen in *The Time of our Lives*, *Kill Switch*, and *I, Witness*. Together the pair display considerable hubris and extremely competitive attitudes over winning a charity competition in *Habeas Corpse*, further entrenching their individual value with their perceived masculinity.

Although pride is not a uniquely masculine emotion, within the context of the likes and interests it is often used a pressure point to call a character's masculinity into question. One such example is Esposito's appreciation for telenovelas. He insists that it is his aunt who loves this form of entertainment when he suspiciously knows a great deal about them, only to reveal later after meeting one of the actresses that he is actually the one who likes telenovelas. When Kate and Rick begin to snicker, Esposito quickly recovers by going on a tangent about how “sexy” the lead actress is on the telenovela. The stereotype involves both ideas that men

cannot enjoy day-time television and the purpose entertainment media is to fulfill the male gaze (Culpepper & Marlowe, 2015).

The assumption that masculinity is associated with immaturity also plays a prominent role in the narrative of *Castle*. From the beginning of their working relationship, Rick consistently annoys Kate with immature comments and behavior. As Kate puts it, “he is like a nine-year-old on a sugar rush, totally incapable of taking anything seriously (Bowman & Marlowe, 2009).” Examples can be found in *Little Girl Lost* and *Dead from New York*.

The male characters in *Castle* display a traditionally ideal hyper-masculinity associated with their sexuality. All of the recurring male characters are heterosexual, presenting only “appropriate” interest in male-to-male interactions (including sexual humor, aggressiveness, surface level emotions, and homophobic humor), and frequently engage in objectifying women based on their appearance. Additionally, Rick is seen in seasons one and seven becoming extremely territorial over Kate. In season one Kate becomes frustrated with this behavior and tells him to “just drop [his] pants and get it over with.” (Terlesky & Marlowe, 2009) The focus on penis size is again revisited in *Clear & Present Danger*, when Esposito ridicules Ryan for taking a security job protecting male strippers.

Castle writers may or may not have intentionally placed so much focus on the male characters’ masculinity; however, it is interesting to note that there is an entire episode devoted to fragile masculinity. *The Time of our Lives* opens like most other episodes, but quickly turns to a dark fantasy when Rick enters a parallel universe (later revealed to be a dream). In this parallel universe, Rick never met Kate in the pilot episode, resulting in a very different life for both of them. While Kate has become extremely successful and is a captain, Rick’s life has

turned into his personal nightmare. In this episode Rick must come to terms with no longer holding the same wealth, status, or sexual appeal or prowess—he is no longer the golden boy loved by all, and is a failure in his own eyes. As the episode unfolds, Rick decides he must change his circumstances to get back his “successful” life because Kate is “better off with [him], and [he is] better off with her” (Holahan & Marlowe, 2014). Rick awakens to the “real” world where he and Kate are still together and he insists that she marry him—successfully sealing his ideal life (and as a result reclaiming his masculinity).

Male Power and Dominance

Alongside their physical and personality traits, the male characters in *Castle* also exude masculinity through power and dominance during their social interactions. However, their power is often assumed, coming from social structure and body language.

This assumed dominance is seen in simple interactions (or the lack of an action). Microaggressions, such as a suspect ignoring Kate’s presence in an interrogation to address the male officer because there is an assumed seniority, reinforce the accepted male dominance within any given situation. (See *Little Girl Lost* and *Meme is Murder* for examples.) Or in the situations where a male is actually in a superior position, using that position to demean the female characters surrounding them—for example the mayor talking about Kate’s appearance as though she is simply arm candy for Rick in *Home is Where the Heart Stops*.

A male’s body language and size is sometimes used to help assert his dominance. During interrogations and chase scenes, male characters will attempt to use this to their advantage to intimidate. The use of size and body language to threaten violence reflects acceptable boundaries of asserting masculinity. *Hong Kong Hustle* provides an example of how this is

achieved; although ultimately unsuccessful, the male suspect crowds close to the female cop, cracking knuckles and puffing out his chest in an effort to make himself appear larger and physically intimidating.

When social structure or body language do not achieve the desired goal, male characters are observed using language itself to gain power in a situation. In *Castle*, this is achieved indirectly through sexualization (resulting in the trivialization) of female characters, or directly through threats and aggressive language. Rick is frequently the source of such sexualization, although his comments do not appear to be out of malice. For example, Gates frequently reprimands Rick for behaving in a manner that would poorly reflect on the NYPD. To one such reprimand he acts surprised and then forcibly kisses Gates on the mouth, rendering her speechless from the shock. When Kate questions this action later, he explains that, “the tactical smooch is just one weapon in [his] vast arsenal” (Riley & Marlowe, 2014). Rick uses sexual language to describe government bureaucracy, discusses porn during investigations, and makes innuendos whenever possible at work, all of which result in the trivialization of the situation. Male characters asserting their dominance directly are usually suspects threatening their victims or Kate. These threats sometimes are seen to fruition, resulting in violence as a plot device, which will be addressed later in more detail.

Hegemonic Ideology in the *Castle* Television Series

Stereotypes

Many of the representations of femininity and masculinity previously mentioned are caricatures of the stereotypes that surround men and women. While there are of course individuals who are hyper masculine or hyper feminine, there are also individuals that display

elements of both. Biological sex does not automatically dictate gender or its presentations. As the *Castle* series is entertainment media, which depends on the understanding of stereotypes to drive the narrative within the narrow confines of its allotted time and structure, its use of gendered stereotypes is no exception.

Within the narrative of *Castle*, there are fairly obvious relationship rules. At the beginning of Rick and Kate's relationship, the romance is a game—both purposefully sexually entice and do things to attract or repel the other. Rick fulfills the stereotype that men flirt with women by teasing or frustrating them. However, the gender roles in the relationship become much more obvious after the pair is married. Kate becomes the stereotype of the nagging/bossy wife, demanding she be given what she wants, as Rick becomes more territorial. Both adults begin to discuss children almost immediately after being married, which is further supported by Martha indicating that they will be likely be parents soon (highlighting the idea that it is a woman's duty to have children after marriage). Or perhaps most interesting is the very brief discussions about last names, especially considering Rick's last name is a pen name. Immediately following their marriage, Rick calls Kate "Mrs. Castle" to which she replies he is "Mr. Beckett." Rick flashes her a look of irritation but the conversation is not continued; Ryan later grabs their attention in *The Wrong Stuff* by referring to the pair as the "Castles," again highlighting an expectation for women after marriage.

Outside of the lead characters' relationship, *Castle* shows female characters offering support to their male counterparts. This is shown through natural progression of events—supporting female characters deliver information to Detectives Ryan and Esposito that builds evidence for the case they are working on solving. But this is also shown to some outlandish

extremes as seen in *Sleeper* and *Hollander's Woods*, where Kate blindly offers professional support to Rick's outlandish theories, risking her position and career. Even more perplexing is the female support seen in *Resurrection* and *Reckoning*, during which two women help a known serial killer achieve his goals for no personal benefit other than his approval or to be in his presence, while simultaneously risking their own lives.

As mentioned previously there are several examples of female and male dominance throughout *Castle*—how that is achieved is partially built upon leader/follower stereotypes. Male characters typically are already in positions of power because of their physicality, body language, and the social structure of their environment. Female characters are also represented as powerful/dominant very frequently, but they usually gain that position through different actions than their male counterparts. Within the *Castle* narrative, this stereotype manifests during interviews, interrogations, and discussions in the precinct. Usually the result is male characters taking the lead in conversations and interactions, with the exception of Rick and Kate displaying a tendency to shift back and forth between the leader/follower roles. Occasionally, the result is male characters questioning female leadership (giving women power in name only).

A gendered stereotype that is seen within the *Castle* narrative is the tendency for males to be given credit for female successes. This is seen most frequently within the context of the social structure supporting the assumption of male leadership, resulting in microaggressions. (For example, Kate and her squad will work together to solve a case, but only the male detectives will be thanked for successfully bringing justice.) One exaggerated example of this stereotype is seen in *In Plane Sight*. Throughout this episode, Alexis is an essential character; it

is her cool-headed response to threats and her attention to surroundings that ultimately solves the case and saves an entire plane full of innocent people. Yet at the episode's conclusion, Rick receives thanks from other characters in front of Alexis while her efforts are completely ignored.

In addition to stereotypes surrounding gender roles, *Castle* makes heteronormative assumptions about all of its recurring characters. This includes ideas about dating, marriage, financial responsibilities based on gender, and procreation. The few times there are characters represented as gay or lesbian it is implicitly stated, and usually as part of narrative humor (See episodes *Home is Where the Heart Stops*, *Kill Switch*, and *The Wrong Stuff*.) These individuals are not shown to have any sexuality at all, and instead it is the stereotypical caricatures that allow them to be identified them as non-hetero. The choice to represent these individuals in a humorous manner further illustrates the influence of heteronormative ideas throughout the *Castle* television series. As part of the heterosexual stereotyping, male characters often engage in objectifying female characters, which will be discussed later in greater detail.

The reverse stereotypes that create narrative humor throughout *Castle* are frequently presented through Rick's character. A scene will show Rick engaging in or describing some activity associated with traditional femininity, creating a humorous moment—however, in some instances Rick will reveal his motives to be in line with more traditional masculinity, usually to the indignation of Kate. (See examples in *Nanny McDead* and *The Last Action Hero*.) It is important to note that Rick challenges traditional masculinity unabashedly when it comes to his role as a father (Rick raised Alexis and takes pride in being a single parent). Examples of this behavior are seen consistently throughout the series as a whole.

The use of reverse stereotypes is not limited to Kate and Rick's relationship. In *Kill Switch*, a female cop presents a tough and clipped exterior, for which Esposito accuses her of having a chip on her shoulder. At the conclusion of episode however, it is revealed that she lied to Esposito so that he would not worry about her and allow her to do her job (thus protecting Esposito). This reverse stereotype is built upon layers of assumptions about female cops and their personalities, and reveals that those assumptions are not always true.

The Male Savior

Hegemonic ideology is also present throughout *Castle* in the form of male saviors. This theme is consistent with ideals of hyper-masculinity, femininity, gender roles, etc. The portrayal of women needing help to complete tasks or women having mundane things explained for them (mansplaining) is seen in every single episode in seasons one and seven (See Appendix A). This theme is prolific in entertainment media as a genre, and *Castle* is no exception.

The idea of the male savior is closely related to the male gaze, meaning that female characters are perceived from the male point of view, and as such they are subjected to fulfilling male desires. This theme is seen profusely within *Castle* through a variety of scenarios.

The Male Gaze

The most common way female characters are subjected to the male gaze in *Castle* is through sexual objectification. As mentioned previously, the female body itself is frequently the primary subject of the shot in any given scene—the pilot episode alone showcases Rick signing a woman's breast, a nude female corpse, men sexualizing the work environment, and most obviously, constant reminders that Rick is literally watching Kate. The entire narrative premise of *Castle* is that Rick will follow Kate around, watching her actions, and then use those actions

as a loose basis for his highly sexualized fictional retelling through the adventures of Nikki Heat. Within the context of the “real life” *Castle* series, Kate is upset with this arrangement, but is told she will cooperate and deal with it as long as Rick would like to follow her, because “the mayor is happy” (Bowman & Marlowe, 2009). Rick is profiting from this relationship monetarily, but as a best-selling author, faces very little risk writing about someone else’s private life, which makes Kate naturally nervous. When she asks just how similar to her Nikki Heat will be, Rick answers, “She’s gonna be really smart, very savvy, haunting good looks, really good at her job. And kind of slutty” (Bowman & Marlowe, 2009). While these are extreme examples, sexualizing the work environment or the female characters as they go about their daily business is commonplace within the narrative.

Although not seen as frequently, the language and narrative in *Castle* supports the hegemonic idea that women are less deserving of respect in situations than men. Situations in which female characters are talked over or about (as though they are non-existent), humor focused on making a character the punch-line of a joke simply because of their sex, and presenting female characters as literal objects (see *The Wrong Stuff* for an example of women as inanimate objects) are all ways which this is displayed. A notable example is seen in *A Death in the Family* after the squad, Rick, Montgomery, and Kate all spend time watching a suspect from behind one-way glass, snickering about the woman’s physical appearance because of her plastic surgeries. When Kate enters the interrogation room, the woman grows tired of Kate’s remarks and states, “Why does he get to tell me what I can and cannot do? Why does he get to decide what I look like?” (Spicer & Marlowe, 2009)

Rape Culture

The natural progression of such ideology leads to the societal environment wherein rape culture becomes a real threat to the very existence of individuals who do not conform to traditional gender roles and to women in general. Rape culture is simply the normalization of violence, particularly in relation to an individual's sex, and the subsequent consequences of ignoring this threat. Women in *Castle* are frequently the recipients of violent threats and actions, which is natural given their profession. More serious however is the frequency with which violence against women is a driving force in the plot of any given episode. Not accounting for the female murder victims (since this is essentially a murder mystery television series), in *Resurrection* and *Reckoning*, this type of violence is the driving force of the episode. Beyond using aggression towards women as a plot device, *Castle* is also guilty of using sexual harassment at work for comedic relief. (See *Nanny McDead* for examples.)

Female blaming is another way that rape culture is perpetuated. In *Castle*, female characters will receive criticism and blame from male counterparts; this results in the female characters having sole responsibility for the situation thrust upon them. Sometimes the weight of responsibility is relatively small—Rick blames Kate for a mistake he made during his own investigation as a private detective. He also tries to manipulate her into feeling guilty about not disregarding protocol when it could help him personally. Other instances are more sinister. In *Resurrection*, female blaming takes center stage as a plot device after Rick decides the whole reason a serial killer exists is because his mother was a bad parent. Through the episode Rick continues to find “evidence” to support his theory (which isn't based in fact) and comes to the conclusion that the women in this killer's life are the reason he kills in the first place.

Normalizing rape culture in everyday social interaction comes from the use of casual sexism in language. Rick and Esposito frequently engage in this type of behavior with Kate and Lanie, usually while attempting to be humorous. For example, Rick calls out to Esposito that he doesn't want to be left out if Esposito is watching porn at the office. Esposito similarly makes highly sexualized remarks about female suspects' appearance, including saying things like "her going to prison? What a tragic waste," as though it is the woman's sole purpose to be freely lusted after by men. (See *Nanny McDead* and *Private Eye Caramba!*) These types of exchanges combined with small references, like calling Kate "sweetheart" instead of Detective Beckett at work, or making grunts at the sight of Lanie at crime scenes, help create and sustain a culture where violence based on gender is a common occurrence.

Narrative Overview of the *Nikki Heat* Novels

Before detailing the results of this study, it will be useful to the reader to have a brief overview of the *Nikki Heat* novels as a reference. As this study's representative sample includes novels one and seven, this overview will focus on a narrative overview of those books only, including the minimum plot information necessary from other books. The series of novels are best described as murder mysteries with elements of erotic romance. They are told from the third-person limited point of view, with Detective Nikki Heat serving as the main character. The *Nikki Heat* novels are unique in that they were an addition to the layered fictional narrative created in *Castle* after the television show first aired.

Heat Wave, the first book in the series of *Nikki Heat* novels, begins by introducing Nikki Heat as she enters a crime scene. She is immediately presented as incredibly sexy, strong, smart, and she demands respect for every victim, no matter who they were in life. She is joined

by Jameson Rook, an investigative journalist with an uncanny knack for annoying comments and solving crimes. Rook has been following Heat for approximately one month prior to the opening scene of the novel, and it is assumed that Heat has never been keen on the arrangement.

As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly apparent that Rook's ability to think outside the box is necessary to solve the case. Heat is frustrated by this, but uses his insight. Their relationship remains professional until Heat is nearly raped and murdered in her own home—she then turns to Rook for a sexual release. Rook becomes increasingly attached emotionally, but Heat keeps him at an arms-length. Heat ultimately solves the case, but is overconfident in her ability to contain a dangerous situation, and places herself, her squad, and Rook in danger. Rook saves the day by gambling his life on Heat's ability to make a single shot count; the novel ends as the pair begin a night of sex.

Heat and Rook continue to have a professional and sexual relationship off and on throughout the series of novels. Their sexual relationship has difficulty becoming a romantic one because Heat is uncertain about opening herself up emotionally as a result of her mother's murder. Rook however is persistent, and proposes marriage at the conclusion of *Raging Heat*, the sixth book in the series. The main characters remain the same, with few additional secondary characters introduced. As each character in the novels represents one of the "real life" characters in *Castle*, there are purposeful similarities to the narrative arcs (and personalities) for the fictional characters in the *Nikki Heat* novels.

The seventh novel in the series, *Driving Heat*, opens with Heat's promotion to captain. She is excited but nervous about the prospect of running her own precinct. On her first day,

Heat discovers her psychologist has been murdered as part of a cover-up. She struggles through her first weeks as captain while Rook provides leadership advice and key information to solve the case. Heat finds herself increasingly distracted—from wedding planning to fear of judgmental opinions to Rook’s sudden kidnapping. It is not until she contemplates self-harm that she realizes she needs to do something about her situation. Heat solves the murder case and unearths a threat to national security with the help of her squad, Rook, and other tertiary characters. The couple is married at the conclusion of the book.

The tone of the novels stays fairly consistent throughout, with a focus on the interpersonal relationships and social commentary. Murder mysteries are simply the vehicle through which these themes are explored. However, there is a noticeable shift in some aspects of the content of the novels. Earlier *Nikki Heat* thrillers contain relatively tame content regarding their language and sex scenes. As the series progresses, they become increasingly realistic in their descriptions (albeit, the sex drive itself for the lead characters seems greatly exaggerated from reality). Additionally, there are a considerable amount of “Easter eggs” (a term for inside jokes or hidden messages within a text) throughout the novels for avid viewers of the *Castle* television series, fans of Nathan Fillion, and popular culture aficionados in general as the series moves forward.

Each book within the series mirrors the season of *Castle* that was on air during or immediately prior to its release. The series obviously contains much more material, however there are considerable similarities to the personal narratives of the characters, the cases, and the clues throughout. Essentially, *Heat Wave* is a companion novel to season one and *Driving Heat* is companion to season seven of *Castle* respectively.

The “Ideal Woman” and Nikki Heat

The *Nikki Heat* novels are presented as a fiction within a fiction; part of the layering includes the mystery of who really writes the novels. Fans have theorized based on interviews and clues from the books themselves, but without confirmation from ABC Studios or the different publishing houses it is impossible to be sure. (The leading theory is that the novels are written by real-life ghostwriter Tom Straw.) Regardless, within the fictional narrative of *Castle*, a male novelist is writing about a female’s perception of the world around her. ABC Studios ensures that Richard Castle is brought to life and has had Nathan Fillion appear at book signings, confirming that at the very least, they are dedicated to protecting the narrative of this fictional reality. This says interesting things about the male gaze’s pervasiveness in entertainment—whether that be through media or literature, entertainment’s purpose is to fulfill the desires from the male perspective. Possible interpretations of this arrangement and its potential implications can be found in the discussion.

Physical Attributes of the Ideal Woman

As the male gaze is so inherently part of Nikki Heat’s story, it is not surprising that she is represented as an exaggeration of several qualities, creating an “ideal woman.” Nikki is introduced immediately as an object of intense sexual desire—the first scene contains a description of a young male officer looking at her bottom. She is described as very attractive, with a long and lean figure, and she possesses incredible strength. Part of her appeal perhaps comes from the lack of detailed description, allowing the reader to fill in the finer details of the generalized stereotypical attractive woman. Her clothing is not frequently discussed, but in *Driving Heat* her attire becomes part of a series of sexualized jokes. Although her race or

ethnicity are never discussed within the narrative, since she based on Kate Beckett, it is assumed she is white.

This style of physical description is consistent throughout the *Nikki Heat* novels. The female characters reflect a “real life” character appearing on *Castle*, so some generalizations can be made about their appearance. However, race and ethnicity are rarely mentioned and can only be inferred from small details shared periodically. For example, the hometown and written dialogue for Lauren Parry (the character inspired by Lanie Parish) reflects stereotypes, indicating she is likely a black woman, but that is never expressly stated.

Body image issues are part of the fictional reality Nikki Heat faces. When Nikki and Lauren go out for a girl night, Nikki’s first response is “Who couldn’t stand to sweat off a few pounds?” (Castle, 2009, pg. 63) This seems unwarranted given how Nikki is described as an extreme athlete, but it appears again throughout *Driving Heat* in conjunction with Nikki’s embarrassment over her uniform and an injury she sustains during work. Rather than be empowered by her physical strength or finding herself attractive, Nikki is consistently concerned with how she is perceived by those around her.

Interestingly, bodily functions are rarely mentioned in the *Nikki Heat* novels and even more rarely in *Castle*. When seen on television, they are naturally woven in to the plot if they are seen at all—consider how often a character eats or drinks something, a character is seen breathing hard or sweating after exerting themselves. Nikki obviously would have natural bodily functions, but they are almost never described unless they fit certain criteria: they should sexualize Nikki’s body while it is performing an everyday task or they should directly be related to a sexual encounter. This includes heavy breathing or sweating after chasing suspects,

bathing, getting dressed for work, and lying down to go to sleep. Descriptions of her sweat and drinking are sexualized to the point of being portrayed as foreplay to a lengthy sexual encounter in *Heat Wave* (Castle, 2009, pp. 97–114).

Femininity and the Ideal Woman

Ideas of femininity within *Nikki Heat* novels are sometimes described plainly and sometimes displayed through actions. Because of the limited point of view, Nikki's thoughts offer more direct ideas about what the ideal woman's perfect life would be. In *Heat Wave*, Nikki spends a significant amount of her time thinking about a life she does not have. According to Nikki (according to Rick) a woman's fantasy is "Connecticut and a yard and the PTA and a husband who took the train to Manhattan, and having the time and resources to get a massage once in a while or maybe take a yoga class...in bed with a roxy tofu advocate with a Johnny Depp beard" (Castle, 2009, p.70). When she's not busy thinking about this dream life, she is busy thinking about rough sport sex or planning her dream wedding.

Femininity expressed through actions in the *Nikki Heat* novels have a tendency to be a female character mothering someone or showing some exaggerated emotional display. Of course, emotions themselves are not necessarily feminine or masculine. The distinction in the *Nikki Heat* novels comes from how frequently female characters display certain emotions and how rarely they display others. For example, the women in these novels will be angry, jealous, judgmental, and insecure. They build surface level friendships only and even those are described as being convenience relationships. Sometimes a female character will act like she is "one of the boys" but then quickly will be "girly" as in an effort to maintain her ultra-feminine image. Such emotional displays could be indicative of many things; however, since the primary

focus of the *Nikki Heat* novels is exploring the interpersonal relationships that Nikki has, it is interesting that there only are certain types of displays.

Outside of necessary interactions, Nikki is often portrayed as self-sufficient. Sometimes this is attached to positive descriptions but others are much more negative. For example, in *Heat Wave* she works the case and chases suspects alongside the male characters with ease, frequently resorting to resolving situations on her own. In these moments she is compared to a machine, which succeeds in dehumanizing her (Castle, 2015, p. 294). She is also described as a very private person, allowing few people to ever meet the “real” Nikki. During the rise to climax in *Driving Heat*, Nikki attempts to do everything on her own and as a result fails to lead. But, this failure is not without a self-sufficient silver lining: Nikki pulls herself out of this situation by realizing “that it [is] not enough to stay positive: She [has] to do positive...Nikki Heat [is] all about action, not wallowing” (Castle, 2015, p. 205).

Perhaps the most obvious character exaggeration indicating the male perspective of ideal femininity is Nikki’s robust libido. In both *Heat Wave* and *Driving Heat* there is consistently sexual tension surrounding Nikki’s character interactions. To be clear, there is nothing wrong or inherently masculine about a female character experiencing sexual attraction or exploring her physicality. However, Nikki fantasizes about two of the male suspects in *Heat Wave* (which seems excessive and unnecessary to the plot) in addition to her previous sex partners and Rook. Combined with the juxtaposition of her character seeking a sexual release with a coworker after narrowly escaping a violent rape, the amount of sexual content is jarring. By the time the narrative has solidified Nikki and Rook as a couple in the novels, it’s come to light that she frequently had sexual relationships in the past purely for the physical pleasure. In *Driving Heat*,

she goes on to have sexual encounters in public places (a strange choice considering she is a captain in the NYPD). Additionally, Nikki never takes sexual notice of other women. As sexually active as her character is, she is described as heterosexual by default and without question.

Power and Dominance in the *Nikki Heat* Novels

Situational Control

The descriptions and language surrounding themes of power and dominance in the *Nikki Heat* novels reflects similar ideas to those found in *Castle*. Because of the novels' limited narrative point of view, power struggles are seen uniquely from the female perspective (as interpreted by the male perspective). Female power and dominance are often represented as an extension of the woman's femininity. Although there are instances of women using masculine approaches to gain power or maintain dominance, the female characters usually utilize more stereotypically "feminine" approaches. With the exception of Nikki's ability to physically overpower men much larger than herself, the female characters described in these books are much more likely to use language and manipulation tactics to achieve their goals.

To gain situational control, Nikki and Lauren both rely heavily on their body language. For Nikki, this appears to be her nature—she moves aware of her size and surroundings, using her height and stance to intimidate. Although she is described as lean, she uses her weight in interrogations, pushing in close to suspects or leaning over tables to show her aggression. When she is faced with delicate situations, Nikki will either use her body as a distraction (by sexualizing her appearance) or she will present herself as open and vulnerable to communicate understanding. By combining these tactics she gains control over the situation, hoping to appear as the dominant role. Although it does not always work, this is almost always how Nikki

operates in any given situation. This becomes problematic for Nikki in *Driving Heat* when these tactics consistently do not work. Lauren's use of body language is seen much more seldom, but by using it she is very successful at intimidating others and asserting her dominance. In *Driving Heat*, Lauren silently shuts down the entire squad and Rook's comments by standing up and glaring at them all (Castle, 2015, pp. 13–14). As a result, Lauren is consistently the dominant personality in the scene when she is present, a stark contrast to Nikki, who struggles to maintain her image at times.

When her body language alone does not successfully control the situation, Nikki turns to physically overpowering other individuals. During these moments, Nikki's internal monologue indicates the pleasure she experiences from the adrenaline rush. She describes the chase as "the live-action video game cops play every day...a race against the clock through an obstacle course (Castle, 2009, p. 52)." With each movement, her physical appearance is described in extreme detail, creating an image of a super-human or a machine, easily dominating any adversary. Nikki's habitual physically aggressive responses do not always bode well for her, however, sometimes resulting in placing herself, her squad, or Rook in unnecessary danger. This occurs in both *Heat Wave* and *Driving Heat's* narratives.

Language itself creates power; female characters in the *Nikki Heat* novels use language in a variety of ways to gain status or power. Most frequently these are seen through manipulation, lying, and threats. This style is consistent with the representations found in *Castle*. In *Heat Wave*, Nikki primarily does this in an effort to get information from suspects. She will frighten suspects with threats of prison time and tell them lies as a gamble to gauge their reactions. But much more frequently, Nikki will emotionally manipulate individuals by taunting,

flirting, yelling or complete silence. As she uses these different approaches, there are reminders that Nikki is purposeful when she chooses to do this. Her inner monologue consistently says things like, “Underneath the hard-ass face she fixed on him, Heat was loving how easily he caved,” and “she loved it when she rattled the tough boys into talking,” indicating that Nikki enjoys these power-plays (Castle, 2009, p. 16, p. 23).

Driving Heat contains similar examples as those found in *Heat Wave*, but what worked previously for Nikki is not as successful. She finds her grasp of control tenuous at best, making mistakes in interrogations and giving in to fits of anger and tantrums when she does not get her way. Even when she is aware of how she should proceed to gain the dominant role over the conversation, she fails at executing her own plan: “One way to keep control of an interview, Nikki had learned through the years, was not to respond to questions. Especially with a smart, strong personality who was accustomed to getting his way, it was too easy to have the meeting wrested from her grip if she let it become his conversation” (Castle, 2015, p. 121). Over the course of the narrative, it is revealed that the source of her struggles is an uncertainty about marrying Rook (a theme which has darker implications considering the influence of the male perspective).

When all else fails, the female characters in the *Nikki Heat* novels use their sexuality to entice and manipulate others around them. Margaret (Rook’s mother, the character representing Martha Rodgers) uses her body and sexual humor to attract attention from everyone in the room, ultimately giving her control (Castle, 2009, pp. 67–68). Nikki is even more direct about using sex to get what she wants. In *Driving Heat*, when she wants information from

Rook that he does not believe it is ethical to share, she promises prison and “some good sex waiting for you when you get out. I still loves me a bad boy” (Castle, 2015, p. 93).

The Ideal Woman in Leadership

Nikki’s struggle with leadership is a prominent theme in *Driving Heat*. What begins as relatively insignificant shortcomings—not assigning a squad leader immediately to replace herself, not filing paperwork,—quickly becomes much more serious. Nikki continues to hedge on assigning a squad leader, causing a breakdown of communication and a power struggle among her detectives, threatening the results of the case. Nikki also is increasingly unstable emotionally, throwing and breaking things in the office, blaming outside offices and other people for her failures, spiraling out of control until she ultimately drinks herself into a stupor. As a result of her consistent failures, male characters begin telling Nikki that she should not be captain and should step down.

As this unfolds, Nikki does little to change her situation. For example, Nikki calls another office to complain about a failure to communicate, causing her to waste a day of investigating. She does not however actively work to improve communication. The man she speaks with laughs at her before pointing out that she is emotionally unstable and hanging up. When two superiors call her for updates and she has failed to deliver on either front, she simply avoids the reality and ignores their demands. Ultimately, she is bluntly told she cannot handle the pressures of leadership: “In your own shop there is leadership unrest due to your perceived lack of commitment to naming you successor as homicide squad leader. And you are spending too much time in the field doing casework instead of sending your people to wear down their shoe leather and report back, like a good administrator should” (Castle, 2015, p. 209).

The attention to Nikki's failures as a captain shifts the novel's focus to her personal growth, professionally and emotionally. Through the use of flashbacks about her counseling sessions, Nikki is forced to voice some of her personal struggles and face her own insecurities. It is only after she similarly faces her insecurities in the office that she begins to change strategies and take on her role as leader. Nikki is accountable to herself for her own emotions, and decides that she needs to embrace what has made her nervous (Castle, 2015, p. 197). She begins to slowly delegate tasks and restore communication between her detectives.

Unfortunately, it appears that Nikki can't win; her leadership choices are continuously questioned by her squad and by Rook. When she is finally completing her assigned duties and fulfilling her role as captain, Nikki is accused of being bossy and acting like the previous captain (who was very unpopular with the detectives). The novel ends with Nikki's recollection of her first weeks as captain:

Her road to taking command had not been smooth and, in hindsight, she should have listened to Rook on her first day when he highlighted the perils of being a leader who couldn't pull the trigger. Naming Sean and Miguel interim squad leaders not only made her seem indecisive, the uncertain nature of the promotion had pitted her two best detectives—not to mention bulletproof partners—against each other in unhealthy competition. She had admitted her error. (Castle, 2015, p. 323)

The difficulties that Nikki faces as captain do not always seem unfounded, but they do not always seem realistic either. This will be addressed in greater detail in the discussion section.

Hegemonic Ideology in the *Nikki Heat* Novels

Sexuality

As within *Castle*, many of the representations of femininity and power previously mentioned are caricatures of the stereotypes that surround men and women. While there are

of course instances that present as contradictory, the *Nikki Heat* novels as a whole use certain stereotypes to drive the narrative forward.

The main characters are all presented as heterosexual or their sexuality is never discussed. It is simply assumed that unless otherwise stated, any character appearing in the *Nikki Heat* novels is straight. There is only one notable outlier—in *Driving Heat*, a homosexual character has a much larger role within the plot. The first murder victim is gay, and his partner plays a key role in following the evidence and capturing a suspect. However, it should be noted that neither character survives the duration of the novel.

Similar to *Castle*, reverse stereotypes are used for humor within the *Nikki Heat* novels, particularly in the context of gender roles. For example, during Rook and Nikki's first sexual encounter he says, "You bed me, but you hide me from your high-class friends. I feel so...cheap" (Castle, 2009, p. 109). This type of exchange carries over into their cab ride the next morning, during which Rook communicates his desire to continue seeing Nikki. This situation is humorous solely because Rook is playing on a stereotype that only women are clingy the morning after, and the stereotype that men are usually the ones to hide a sexual encounter from their friends because of who the sex partner was. In the novels, gender role reversal occurs for male and female characters, however a male showing stereotypically feminine traits is portrayed as humorous. There are no noteworthy instances where a woman displaying a masculine trait is presented in an amusing way.

The Male Gaze

There are copious examples of the male gaze in the *Nikki Heat* novels. Women are objectified based on appearance, facing lewd comments as part of their everyday life. Nikki

experiences this to varying degrees from coworkers, suspects, witnesses, and Rook. The sexualization of Nikki is presented as commonplace, something that is natural to her and something to be simply ignored.

Other female characters experience similar interactions, even occasionally at the hands of other women. One example takes place in *Heat Wave* after Nikki conducts an interrogation. The squad, Rook, and Nikki all discuss qualities of the witness, a young female Swedish immigrant. All share a laugh when Rook describes her by saying, “she’s like Swedish furniture. Beautiful to look at but pieces missing” (Castle, 2009, p. 163). Nikki often participates in these types of interactions, sharing her own derogatory comments about women based on their appearance. In this way, Nikki is fulfilling the male gaze by being unbothered by sexism and objectification. Nikki even goes so far as sexualizing a non-sexual encounter herself.

Sexualization of the female body is a major theme throughout the *Nikki Heat* novels. Because Nikki is the character whose perspective the story is explained through, she is the recipient of the majority of this type of language and behavior. This occurs in her home, at work, and in public. Usually when this occurs at home (or more specifically, whenever Rook is the one sexualizing her) this is not presented in a negative manner. Quite the opposite, Nikki actively engages in it: “But this time, in the industrial lift’s sexually charged atmosphere, the eye games and the frank appraisals and the transparency of desire grew thick enough to take on life. Decorum vanished, giving way to animal impulse” (Castle, 2015, p. 1).

Nikki does not have consistent responses when faced with situations that place her as the focus of casual sexualization. Sometimes she ignores it entirely and moves forward with whatever she is doing. Examples of this occurs in *Driving Heat* after a congressman comments

on her “pretty” appearance before mansplaining evidence for her (Castle, 2015, p. 162-165) and in *Heat Wave* when a judge agrees to sign a warrant for her only if she gets “her heinie back to Rook’s poker table” (Castle, 2009, p.176). At other times she reclaims the language and labels placed upon her, calling herself a “bitch” and uses body language to dominate (Castle, 2009, pp. 148-150). Nikki also internalizes the sexualization and accommodates the male gaze—after a mobster teases her about wearing her uniform in public, she changes into regular clothes. Later the mobster tells her, “smart move ditching that uniform. You’ve got too much going on to hide it” (Castle, 2015, p. 239).

Rape Culture

Nikki Heat’s reality reflects Kate Beckett’s. The characters face violence and sexism frequently as part of their narratives, helping to create and sustain a culture where violence based on gender is a common occurrence. The *Nikki Heat* novels present sexualization and violence against women as normal.

Perhaps the most notable instance takes place in *Heat Wave* when Nikki’s nudity (because she was taking a bath) becomes a prominent plot point that ultimately saves her life (an unlikely event) during a home invasion. The scene progresses and a male suspect attempts to rape her and promises to kill her. When she successfully overpowers him and chases him from her apartment, her nudity becomes humorous, and she goes back inside (Castle, 2009, pp. 73-79). The choice to focus on Nikki’s body, create humor in the context of an attempted rape, the moments leading to attempted rape itself, and Nikki’s return to work the next morning all serve to support the hegemonic ideology surrounding rape and violence against women. Nikki blames herself for the situation and back at the precinct instead of showing concern, her squad

makes light of the situation saying, “we pretty much don’t give a shit. She’s a big girl” (Castle, 2009, p. 78). Furthermore, this scene is not necessary to plot besides being the catalyst that begins Nikki and Rook’s sexual relationship—which is a disturbing connection.

The sexual relationship that results from Nikki’s near-death experience is the primary example of male saviors in the *Nikki Heat* novels, a theme that is consistently present throughout the narrative. Nikki, an extreme athlete in peak physical condition and an armed police officer, is told frequently by the male characters that she needs protection. She is coddled and told to relax by her captain, because he wants to protect her from her own emotions (Castle, 2009, p. 40). Rook follows her home and ignores personal boundaries because he “just wanted to make sure” she was safe (Castle, 2009, p. 94). The male savior becomes a literal theme in *Driving Heat* when Rook saves Nikki’s life twice (one time because he is attempting to seduce her while she is working).

The male savior ideology also presents as men explaining obvious things to women (mansplaining) and men being more successful at a woman’s job than she is in the *Nikki Heat* novels. For example, Rook mansplains to Nikki basic etiquette for meeting someone new in *Heat Wave*. In *Driving Heat*, men are constantly giving leadership advice and explaining how she should use her service weapon. And very similarly to *Castle*, Rook is an absolute necessity throughout all of the *Nikki Heat* novels—without his input, Nikki would not be able to solve her cases.

Creating Meaning

Individually, these examples from *Castle* or from the *Nikki Heat* novels do not amount to representations of hegemonic ideology. But given their abundance, they create patterns and

themes, especially in light of their reinforcement through multiple entertainment platforms. Some support the dominant cultural ideology while others present interesting challenges. As a researcher I have done my best to be as thorough and clear as possible in my results. The following section will discuss the interpretation and implications of the themes present in this sample of entertainment media. In the discussion I will include my opinions based on my findings supported by appropriate theory. The results outlined my findings from my analysis of *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels separately for ease of understanding; the discussion will include relevant elements from both texts for comparative purposes and ease of connection.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The themes that emerged as a result of a detailed textual analysis indicated patterns of representation that reflected and challenged hegemonic ideology's presence in entertainment media. The previous section focused solely on outlining those results. The discussion's purpose is to consider those results in context of the research questions. *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels will be examined together, comparing for similarities and differences. Interpretation of the combined results follows, supported by feminist, communication, and postmodern theories. As a feminist researcher, I have included my personal analysis alongside the discussion; I have done my best to mark my personal analysis clearly.

Femininity and Masculinity in *Castle/Nikki Heat* Novels

RQ1: How do the *Castle/Nikki Heat* narratives represent femininity and masculinity and how have these narratives evolved throughout the series?

The textual analysis revealed that *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels depend on caricatures and exaggerations of notions of femininity and masculinity. The vast majority of the time characters in the televised series and in the novels presented the stereotypically feminine and masculine traits associated with their biological sex. When characters diverted from these norms, the action was part of the narrative's humor (usually Rick behaving in some way slightly "feminine") or limited to Kate/Nikki's violent tendencies. Unfortunately, there were almost no instances where homosexual, transgender, or gender non-conforming individuals were represented in either text. Representation of sexuality and gender will be further discussed in *Contextual Framing Presenting as Hegemonic Ideology*.

The physical representations of femininity reflected cultural ideals of attractiveness—lead female characters' bodies were hyper-sexualized. They were presented in attractive clothing and wearing makeup at all times. While each of the female characters' appearance evolved over the course of the narrative, Kate's appearance was the most drastic. By season seven she looks increasingly similar to a fashion model instead of a police officer. In Nikki's case, she is described vague terms, but all descriptions indicate she is very attractive—leaving the reader to fill in details of what the ideal attractive woman would look like in their own imaginations. There is some diversity amongst main characters in *Castle*, but race or ethnicity is never directly mentioned (unless the subject is a criminal) in the *Nikki Heat* novels. All of the recurring female characters in both texts were presented or described as physically fit and athletic to varying degrees. Bodily functions are attributed to ideal femininity in the *Nikki Heat* novels through intense sexualization.

Tertiary characters and guest actors in the texts were representative of a considerably diverse grouping of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, physical appearances, and were of varying levels of stereotypical attractiveness. However, these characters closely followed cultural stereotypes, which minimizes their impact and individuality.

While the use of stereotypes on television is to be expected (See Moyer-Gus, 2008; Savage, 2015) the specific stereotypes surrounding physical representations of femininity in the texts are constricting. The consistent representation of only stereotypically attractive women contributing to the narrative in a positive manner indicates certain ideas about a culture's ideology and power structures. In essence, within *Castle's* and the *Nikki Heat* novels' depiction of reality, to be feminine is to have stereotypically attractive features. (A fact that has darker

implications considering the popularity of these texts and the persuasive nature of entertainment media.)

An alternative interpretation however focuses on the diversity seen in *Castle*. Two of the main characters are black women. They have different body types, each fulfilling a different ideal body image—one is relatively thin but has a perfect hourglass, the other has a large buttocks. Two of the other characters are vibrant redheads, a hair color often mocked or viewed as an oddity when it occurs naturally. And although the female characters represent different ages (approximately 15–65 years old depending on the individual), they are all presented as attractive. This indicates that *Castle* ignores stereotypes surrounding certain traits for women (such as viewing pear shaped individuals as attractive or portraying older women as sexy). In this interpretation, *Castle* normalizes women for whatever physical traits they possess. However, this does not address the connection between these idealized characters with the stark contrast seen in representations of characters presented as victims or criminals.

As mentioned previously, the *Nikki Heat* novels are part of a multilevel fictional reality that takes place across two mediums. In this reality, Nikki is the creation of the “real life” male novelist, Richard Castle, writing about a woman’s perception of the world around her. The fictional *Castle* television show is presented as real, down to Richard Castle being credited as the author of the series of novels. Furthermore, Andrew Marlowe is the creator, lead producer, and main writer of the television series. This means that within the *Castle* television series and the *Nikki Heat* novels, a male is writing the female perspective. Given the climate of Hollywood, (see Ogilvie, 2015) this comes as no great surprise. But, it is incredible that a man is profiting from writing a television show about a man profiting from writing about a woman’s life in a

highly sexualized manner. In this example Marlowe has achieved the ultimate realization of the male gaze.

As the male gaze is so inherently part of Nikki Heat's story, it is not surprising that she is represented as an exaggeration of several qualities, creating the "ideal woman." This goes beyond the physical representations (such as tall, thin, and white) to include personality traits and libido. The female characters of *Castle* face similar exaggerations, although not quite as severe. Smelik (2007) stated this voyeuristic action entered the "real world" with issues of body image and objectification, both of which are recurring themes in the texts. This representative sample of entertainment media presents a consistent image of women being eroticized by men for profit.

The personality traits attributed to femininity in *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels also represent stereotypes. Both texts consistently represent certain personality traits in female characters and almost never show the same traits in male characters, indicating that these characteristics are more firmly associated with femininity. The female characters are prone to intense emotional displays including anger, jealousy, insecurity, and cattiness with other women. Sometimes stereotypes are exaggerated to the point they become part of the narrative's humor (i.e. the hysterical woman trope) in both texts. According to Baxter (2008), differentiation based on gender is one of the most pervasive ways in which a culture maintains its status quo. This pattern of representation encourages assumptions that only women feel these types of emotion, and that femininity and womanhood inherently mean experiencing them in extremes.

Of course, emotions themselves are not necessarily feminine or masculine, and the experience of those emotions is not limited to any gender. The distinctions made in *Castle* and in the *Nikki Heat* novels could be indicative of a series of conscious or unconscious decisions made by the writers, directors, and producers. Because humans learn behavior through interaction, and much of our interactions come from parasocial relationships, the consistent representation of femininity in specific ways in media creates a cyclical relationship with the consumers and creators of media. Essentially, because we consume media, we begin to believe the representations we see, and then project those representations into our own lives (Gerbner, 1977).

Since the primary focus of these texts is to explore the interpersonal relationships of the lead characters, their actions, behaviors, descriptions, and presentations may indeed be very purposeful—with differentiations comes conflict and the struggle for dominance. If language and representations support the status quo, then it follows that this representation provides a model of behavior with which viewers are intended to interact with (Mellencamp, 1995; Bandura, 1971). Returning to the fact that *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels are written by men but explore the world predominantly through female characters, these texts fulfill the male gaze and provide the idealized version of femininity that supports hegemonic ideology.

The textual analysis revealed that masculinity was represented in similarly constricting ways on *Castle*. Physically, all male characters fit cultural ideals of attractiveness—they are healthy and muscular and frequently wear clothing that shows off their physiques. The recurring male characters were also diverse racially. However, the male body was rarely the focus of the shot or the interaction, as opposed to the frequency attention was given to the

female body. The rare times that a male character's appearance was mentioned directly, it was presented humorously, especially so if the male was behaving in a way that was in the least bit "feminine." In this aspect, the confines of "appropriate" masculinity are presented as extremely narrow in terms of appearance. Although female characters can certainly present "masculine" characteristics, and vice versa (and anywhere in between) this simply was not how the characters were portrayed in *Castle*.

Interestingly, physical representations of masculinity are almost never addressed in the *Nikki Heat* novels. When they are, they also adhere to the same "ideal" masculinity. This may be due to the perspective of the novels—because they are told in third person limited point of view, the only impressions and descriptions given come from Nikki or the setting. This leaves most things to be learned from dialogue, limiting the possibilities based on the conversations. Because the male characters in the *Nikki Heat* novels are based on characters in *Castle*, it can be assumed that there is some diversity, but that is never explicitly stated.

Castle reveals what traits are valued as "masculine" visibly by focusing on male characters' personal interactions. Rick, Esposito, and Ryan all exhibit hyper-masculine personality traits, such as overly inflated egos, immaturity, intensely competitive natures, and a love of sports and women. Frequently their interactions are accompanied by humor, normalizing these types of interactions and interests. Any action male characters take outside of accepted masculinity is met with ridicule or presented as humorous, indicating that men should not behave in such manners. One episode devotes the entire plot, whether intentionally so or not, to the exploration of ideal masculinity and just how fragile it can be. The *Nikki Heat* novels do not address masculinity directly, although they do present hegemonic ideology

concerning male saviors (which will be discussed in *Contextual Framing Presenting as Hegemonic Ideology*).

The representations of masculinity seen in *Castle* abide by the same rigid stereotyping as its representations of femininity. Given that the majority of the television show is devoted to showing how men and women express themselves to and among each other, this is simply disheartening. The first season of *Castle* ignored some cultural expectations, (for example giving Kate short hair and impressive physical strength) but as the series progressed, it became increasingly a celebration of traditional expectations and hegemonic ideology. Budgeon (2013) explained this idealized version of masculinity and femininity plays a part in construction of self and the categorization of each individual within a social structure. Therefore, entertainment media representations of gender influence interactions and processes that develop and maintain a patriarchal society.

Womanhood, Identity, and Authority

RQ2: How does the multiplatform fictional reality convey notions of womanhood, identity, and authority?

Castle and the *Nikki Heat* novels depend on over-simplified stereotypes in their character representations. This is particularly obvious in the *Nikki Heat* novels when describing womanhood and sexual identity (See Byerly, 2007). Nikki frequently engages in fantasies about the perfect life in *Heat Wave* (Castle, 2009). These include things that women “should” want—idyllic homes with front yards, massages and yoga classes, and hot sex with attractive men. In *Driving Heat* (Castle, 2015) these fantasies turn to rough sport sex and wedding planning. In both texts women are represented as mothers and protective caregivers for the men in their

lives. England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek (2011) attributed these types of consistent representations of womanhood in entertainment to a fear of women leaving traditional gender roles.

Characters in both texts have identities wrapped in stereotypical assumptions about what men and women “should” want in their lives. Aside from acceptably masculine/feminine likes and interests (and the occasional outlier used for humor), characters also are presented almost exclusively as heterosexual. The sexual identity is assumed and presented without question; all recurring characters in both texts at some point have a love interest or show sexual desire with the opposite sex. There is also a tendency to describe male characters as hyper-masculine/homophobic in any instance where any identity outside of hetero-normative could be indicated in the slightest. This symbolically annihilates and Others any views or identities that do not conform to the narrow constraints of the dominant cultural ideology (See Grinner, 2004).

Nikki Heat’s sexuality provides an example of over exaggerated “ideal” characteristics. Nikki’s constant sexual fantasies at work, at home, and in public (even following her attempted rape and murder) seem excessive. Similarly, although not as outlandish, the characters in *Castle* also are portrayed building sexual tension in strange settings. This preoccupation with heterosexuality and the libido of the characters in both texts reflects the presence of hetero-privilege and the male gaze seen in entertainment media. As stated by Ebert (1988), the signification of one gender (or in this case, one gender identity) over others supports the divisions created by patriarchal society.

An alternative interpretation could view Nikki's intense sexuality as a work of empowerment; instead showing a male character constantly aroused and sexualizing situations, the *Nikki Heat* novels flip the gender stereotype. Paired with her physical strength and sense of humor, Nikki could be called a modern day retelling of the 'tomboy' archetype (See Hoogland, 2007). She is tough and is able to get what she wants by any means necessary—and often what she wants is sex. However, given the overall tone of the novels and how they have been influenced by the male perspective, I do not believe this interpretation to be the case. Even if *Nikki Heat* is viewed as a positive representation of sexually empowered women, I do not believe this was the intention of the writer, rather she was intended to attract a wider audience through sex appeal.

Authority figures are naturally part of the narrative for *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels. In both texts, the lead female character is already an authority figure as a police officer, and she is in charge of her squad of detectives. There are higher level authorities that the lead female characters must obey, but they are usually in agreement, with a few notable exceptions. In *Driving Heat*, Nikki is promoted to captain and given more responsibility as a leader. This becomes central to the novel's plot and provides the conflict for the characters' interpersonal relationships.

While some of the struggles Nikki faces as a new captain are realistic, other challenges she faces seem out of place. For example, Nikki is seen consistently failing to grasp important information and come to the right conclusions. She is overly-reliant on the opinions of others. Nikki becomes volatile and aggressive when she does not get her way, she breaks things in the office, and she yells at her detectives for things they had no control over. She blames the

breakdown of communication and relationships on outside forces, instead of admitting her own responsibility and lack of leadership. She refuses to delegate tasks or make executive decisions. All combined, this seems excessive—and certainly not like someone who would ever receive a promotion making them precinct commander. Aside from the emotional outburst, these faults are not particularly unbelievable individually. Together, they reinforce a driving theme in this novel’s narrative: women can’t handle the pressures that come with positions of authority. In the event that Nikki’s consistent failure does not make this point clear enough, the dialogue states this “fact” outright multiple times.

Castle presents this theme in more subtle ways. Kate is often shown following the lead of male characters, doing what male characters want or ask from her, and providing support for their ideas instead of providing her own. In spite of Kate’s role as lead detective, she often must rely on male characters to lead her in the right direction on the case or to provide her with instruction or advice. *Castle* also shows male characters receiving credit for the work and contributions of female characters.

These texts present womanhood, sexual identity, and authority in ways that do not reflect reality. While some of the representations can be viewed as good and empowering, others are limiting and narrow, supporting only the dominant cultural ideology. In essence, *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels support privilege because they define these things according to the dominant grouping (Hare-Mustin, 2004). Womanhood is only described in how it relates to a “perfect life” with a man. Identity is assumed to be heterosexual, and sex itself is only described or fantasized about when it is between a woman and a man. Authority figures are always present, but female authority figures are not successful unless they are following the

leadership or advice of a man. This is the epitome of dominant ideology in Western media culture, defining and describing reality in relation to the male (Smelik, 2007).

Negotiating Power and Powerlessness

RQ3: How is power and powerlessness negotiated in the *Castle*/*Nikki Heat* phenomenon?

Issues of power and dominance are presented differently for male characters and female characters between *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels. While they share some commonalities for the main female characters, such as body language and verbal language, the texts sexualize the female characters to different degrees. The most obvious difference, however, comes from the complete lack of description of male dominance found in the *Nikki Heat* novels. This failure to specifically address men in positions of power comes from the limited point of view of the narrative, but the lack of discussion or description of male characters in this way is still interesting. It could be interpreted to mean that the writing (from a fictional male author) simply assumes that males would be dominant in any position, and therefore it did not necessitate description. It could also be interpreted to mean that the *Nikki Heat* novels intend to empower female characters, focusing only on their dominance.

The women in *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels negotiate their way through most interpersonal situations by relying on their physical appearance and body language. In both texts, the lead female character uses her body as a distraction by placing herself in the line of sight. She intimidates and exudes control over suspects and her love interest by placing her body extremely close, using her physical size and strength as a deterrent for arguments. There are scenes in both texts where the lead female character will ball her fists, slam things around and break objects, cross her arms, or roll her eyes heavily to indicate her emotions and

manipulate the emotions of others around her. These tactics are frequently successful, but not always. Other women follow similar patterns in both texts, but usually rely heavily on one particular style. For instance, in the *Nikki Heat* novels, Lauren almost exclusively gains dominance by intimidating people around her with body language, wordlessly commanding attention and respect.

Both texts also present women gaining power in situations by sexualizing their own bodies. They will achieve this by physically changing their appearance (leaning over provocatively, changing outfits, and other tactics) or using their tone and language to threaten or promise things in a sexual manner. In *Castle*, this is seen usually in the context of Kate and Rick's personal and working relationship—she will sexualize a situation, using her body to distract Rick and get what she wants. Occasionally, she flirts or uses “sexy” body language to similarly distract suspects. *Nikki Heat* uses very similar tactics, but the language describing Heat (and her own language in the dialogue) is much more sexualized. The sexualization of the *Nikki Heat* character is so exaggerated, it seems out of place, and makes the male perspective's influence of the writing obvious. For example, her body's functions, positions, and movement will be described in minute detail, creating vivid imagery of certain points on her body. Additionally, in moments of extreme exertion, she will be described as superhuman or mechanical in nature.

When all else fails, Kate and *Nikki* resort to physical violence in order to dominate a situation and gain control. This is relevant because they are the only female characters in their respective texts to do so consistently. (This excludes some female criminals seen in *Castle*.) Kate uses physical violence sparingly, but proves that she is very capable of it, eventually killing

another woman with her bare hands. Nikki however uses violence to assert herself frequently, chasing down male suspects, tackling them, and using her extensive athletic training to subdue them. This proclivity for violence is not represented in a negative manner for either character and instead is presented as one of the more alluring qualities in their personal lives.

Language and manipulation is used much more universally by the female characters in *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels. While tone can only be inferred from the language Nikki uses, in *Castle* all of the female characters use their tone to indicate their opinions and assert themselves. Both texts show numerous examples of female characters threatening other individuals, lying, and manipulating the situation by using other characters' emotions to achieve their own personal goals. The emotional manipulation is presented almost exclusively as a feminine trait and only used by female characters. It is important to note that in *Castle*, the female characters are often presented as having power in name only over any given situation. Regardless of the reason why these representations are shown, they do represent stereotypes that influence and shape cultural ideology. As stated previously, "members of a culture learn implicitly about the rules, norm, and power structures of their cultures. In other words, the media are one of the places where people learn about their culture's ideology" (Rockler-Gladen, 2004, p. 192).

Due to the narrative style of the *Nikki Heat* novels, male characters negotiating their power and dominance are rarely described directly. Conversely, this is one of the central themes in *Castle*, but it is important to note that male characters often are given control implicitly. Male characters throughout the text are shown dominating the conversation or situation because of the social structure (it is assumed that the male character takes the lead,

female characters automatically follow suit). During instances where male characters feel that dominance may be threatened, they use their body language, size, and stance to intimidate. When these tactics don't work, male characters in *Castle* begin to assert their dominance directly, using language to sexualize (and therefore trivialize) female characters or to threaten other characters. (Lunceford, 2013) Often, this results in violence against women as a plot device.

The characters in *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels are shown or described vying for power in different ways. Some characters inherently have more power than others in a given situation; sometimes this advantage is because of their gender, sometimes it is because of another factor (such as holding a weapon). Regardless if they are male or female, all characters use their body language and language to gain or maintain their power. Lacan stated this is because language (and body language indirectly) are used to ascribe meaning to situations, objects, people, etc. in any given culture. Ultimately the agreed upon meaning defines the social arrangement (Ebert, 1988).

As described in the results, *Castle* frequently presents situations where male characters have a natural advantage due to their gender. The *Nikki Heat* novels inherently describe, define, and narrate the female perspective from the male perspective. This made using FPDA a natural choice when studying and analyzing both texts' expectations and negotiations of power. As a uniquely "*feminist* [emphasis added in original] approach to analyzing the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in the world according to the ways they are located by interwoven discourses," FPDA revealed societal expectations surrounding how women should respond to certain situations (Baxter, 2004, p. 295). The *Castle*

and *Nikki Heat* narratives indicate that women should subordinate themselves to men or risk violent consequences. When female characters were successful in gaining power, it was often by sexualizing their own bodies (an act that could be interpreted as actualizing male dominance in spite of the female character's motivation) or through manipulation. Essentially, the texts support cultural ideologies that support patriarchal thinking through their use of consistent images and language during power negotiation (See Weatherall, 2015; Weisstein, 1971).

Contextual Framing Presenting as Hegemonic Ideology

RQ 4: How does contextual framing influence the discourse between characters in the televised fictional setting versus the literary fictional setting?

I was surprised by the results of this study; I did not expect to find hegemonic ideology at the core of most character interactions and descriptions in both texts. I was aware going into the data analysis that stereotypes and the male gaze would play a prominent role; however, I expected *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels to challenge normative thinking much more frequently. Unfortunately, the stereotypical representation of gender and gender roles, sexuality, and the use of stereotypes as humor is pervasive and supports master narratives, particularly for women, in the storytelling (See Maines, 2001; Russ, 2004).

Castle and the *Nikki Heat* novels present strict gender roles for their characters, particularly in the context of romantic and sexual relationships. The lead male and female characters abide by "traditional" masculinity and femininity; they also follow traditional expectations (the male taking the lead and achieving success, the female concerned with home-making and procreation). Outside of relationships, strict gender roles are still presented as the

norm, with male characters receiving credit for female character success and female characters seen as powerful in name only.

The sexuality of characters in both texts is an intense area of focus. However, the representation of all characters as heterosexual (either explicitly or by default) is limiting; the lack of characters represented in entertainment media symbolically annihilates and Others any non-hetero individual. The rare examples of gay and lesbian characters seen in either text follow two narrow narrative purposes: reinforcing negative stereotypes or presenting these characters as victims of violence. The preoccupation with procreation as a result of heterosexual relationships also is damaging in that it precludes any possibility of anyone not fitting that narrow ideological construct having a family. (A consequence of social definitions and symbolic ordering represented by the collected patterns and their meanings, as explained by Altheide, 1996.)

The use of reverse stereotypes as humor initially struck me as a challenge to hegemonic ideology. In *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels, the lead male character frequently is described or shown enjoying something that stereotypically would be labeled feminine. However, upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that these instances would not be considered funny if they did not appear out of place. A particularly alarming example comes from *Heat Wave*, when Rook accuses Nikki of using him for a night of wild sex. The scene is humorous only because he is portrayed as clingy and nagging while using bargaining tactics to try are remain relevant and dominant in the situation (stereotypically something only a woman would do). Because this is used for humor, it draws attention to and reinforces harmful stereotypes around women, sexual boundaries, relationships, and consent. By applying conversation analysis to examples

such as this within the texts, it is obvious that the characters were consistently represented as engaging in set activities to produce set ideas about social interaction (Kitzinger, 2000).

The nature of the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon lends itself to complex relationships between characters, setting, and descriptive language. *Castle* was created, written, directed, and produced by a man (it should be noted that there were guest writers, producers, and directors who were men and women). The Nikki Heat character and her life is a subplot of *Castle*, a fictional reality within a fictional reality, written by a fictional man. The most predominant fan theories indicate that the novels are actually written by a male ghostwriter. So, it comes as no great surprise that the male gaze heavily influences the contextual framing of the respective narratives in an effort to draw audiences. (See Traube, 1992.)

Female characters are constantly subjected to objectification throughout the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon. In both texts, women are described as sexually desirable and openly lusted after, their bodies subjected to intense scrutiny. Female characters are noticed based on their physical appearance, particularly their bodily shape. Women are represented as something to be chased, the reward for successfully presenting hyper-masculine qualities. As Berger put it, “men act and women appear, or rather: men look and women are looked at” (Smelik, 2007, p. 180). The consistent (and deliberate) sexual objectification of the female body plays a key role in the lead male characters’ motivations and interactions. This is exaggerated to ridiculous proportions in *Castle* when women are presented as literal objects to be talked over and about, or when a woman’s presence in a scene is a joke.

Similarly, *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels represent female characters in need of a male savior (exemplifying the damsel in distress trope). It is a recurrent theme, to the point that it

enters the narrative on multiple occasions. Kate and Nikki routinely find themselves unable to draw basic conclusions based on evidence, and they need Rick/Rook or their squad to supply them with answers and direction. The sheer amount of times that Rick or Rook subdues a dangerous suspect (even though both characters aren't supposed to be particularly athletic and neither has any police training whatsoever) is comical. Additionally, female characters find themselves in need of explanation for mundane activities (how to meet new people, how sex works, and other topics).

The *Nikki Heat* novels take this theme a step further with recurring scenarios where women need protection. In spite of being an adult and living on their own, female characters find themselves needing a literal savior. Rook's timely appearance actually saves Nikki's life on multiple occasions.

As a result of these consistent images and descriptions, ideas propagating rape culture are normalized. Both texts use violence against women as an integral plot point at least one time outside of the murder mystery's narrative and in the personal lives of the characters. *Castle* uses this theme much more frequently (likely because of the amount of material covered by the representative sample), even devoting entire episodes to it. Instances of female blaming are presented as natural and appropriate, even in the most extreme scenarios. For example, in *Castle* Rick blames a serial killer's mother for all of the serial killer's actions, and in *Heat Wave* Nikki blames herself when a suspect attempts to rape and murder her.

Entertainment media like *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* novels may help to cultivate rape culture by trivializing casual sexism in language and in everyday life. The extreme or violent examples above are obvious, but it is the subtle aggressions that allow gendered violence to

persist. Both texts frequently refer to the lead female character as “sweetheart” or simply ignore their presence and contributions. The premise of *Castle* itself supports this type of behavior—a man is forcing himself on a woman so he may profit from it monetarily and socially. I found this result of the study to be the most disappointing; the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon has potential as a cultural artifact to influence. Of course, it was successful in that influence simply because of its presence in popular culture.

Gerbner (1977) found the longer an audience spends interacting with something, the more they will come to define their understanding of reality by that thing. The multilayer fictional reality of *Castle/Nikki Heat* reflects heavy influence of the male gaze and hegemonic ideology, but presents itself under the guise of representing strong female characters. While there are many positive aspects to the television series and novels, they unfortunately are unified in their presentation of a cultural ideology of patriarchy and Othering (Byerly, 2007).

CHAPTER 6

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Researchers interested in studying entertainment media's influence on culture should first consider what specific aspect they are interested in studying. Over the course of my writing and data collection I realized that my scope was larger than I had intended. I considered too many elements from too large of a text, which forced me to work a considerable amount of time longer to remain thorough. It made the process much more difficult, although it was all the more rewarding upon my completion.

In relation to this specific study there are a few recommendations I have for future research. First, I would recommend future research consider other elements of the *Castle/Nikki Heat* series. There are interesting questions still to be explored—such as how audience how marketing and product placement influenced the narrative, how has an authorized fan fiction has outlived its inspiration, and other similar questions. Because this was not a reception study, I could not make definitive statements regarding parasocial relationship between audiences and the characters (beyond my own appreciation). A study focusing on audience reception, how audience feedback dictated the content of the show, or how audiences personally viewed and identified with the lead female characters would be useful for many different academic interests.

Second, I would recommend that future research consider similar texts for a point of comparison. The *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon is unique in how it has unfolded with the television show inspiring the novels. But it would be interesting to look at television content that follows similar narratives (for example, how Gaffney paired *Castle* and *Bones*), specifically

tragicomedies or the crime genre. How would a television series, such as *M*A*S*H* or *Scrubs*, that is part of the same genre but dealing with different content relay issues of masculinity and femininity and power? Or how does modern crime television display the same issues? Are there patterns and tropes that have developed specific to these genres?

Third, if future researchers are interested in the relationship between broadcast/electronic media and literature, I recommend that they devote an entire study to that subject only. My set of research questions about *Castle's* relationship to the *Nikki Heat* novels only scratched the surface of what could be learned from the unique relationship of a literature adaption (instead of the traditional film adaption) to its televised counterpart. It would be interesting to take a close look at specific elements borrowed, how the sequence of events changes in the respective narratives, what influence one has over the other's reception, and whether the source material acknowledges the secondary creations.

Finally, if I were to repeat this study I would not select the first and seventh seasons and the first and seventh novels of *Castle* and the *Nikki Heat* series respectively. This was not my original plan, but I followed the recommendations of my committee because of their concerns about the amount of time the study would take. I now believe this was an incorrect judgement for two reasons. By viewing only these sample seasons and books, the scope of this study was limited to a very narrow slice of the narrative, which did not allow for the examination of character evolution or provide opportunity to see themes and trends over the course of both series as a whole. Additionally, my sample as it is did not save me any time—it in fact caused my research to take much longer than my original plan. Instead of using a selection process to gather a representative sample from the entire text, I considered two large sample sets in very

minute detail. In essence, I worked harder and longer for data that does not necessarily represent the whole.

I completed this research in the hopes that it would add to the literature surrounding a very specific niche in entertainment media that has been dear to me. I believe that it accomplished that goal. I can only hope that it inspires continued research into the topics discussed and that it serves as a springboard for new and inventive thoughts about entertainment media.

APPENDIX A

MASTER OUTLINE FOR *CASTLE* TELEVISION SHOW

- Femininity
 - Physically
 - Attractive
 - Body
 - Attire/makeup
 - Diverse
 - Fit
 - Personality
 - Motherly/protective
 - Frustrated/scolding/angry
 - Hysterical
 - Jealous
 - Insecure
 - Territorial
 - Judgmental
 - Body image
 - Slut shaming
 - Sexuality
 - Female power and dominance
 - Physical appearance/body language
 - Sexualization as a tool for control
 - Stance/position/movement
 - Physically overpowering
 - Language and manipulation
 - Tone
 - Threats
 - Lying
 - Emotions
 - Bossy
 - Power in name only
- Masculinity
 - Physically
 - Attractive
 - Healthy/fit
 - Attire
 - Diverse
 - Personality
 - Egotistical/prideful
 - Likes/interests

- Immature
 - Sexuality
 - Fragile masculinity revealed
- Power and dominance
 - Social structure
 - Body language
 - Size
 - Stance
 - Language
 - Sexualization
 - Threats/aggression
- Hegemonic ideology
 - Stereotypes
 - Gender roles
 - Relationship rules
 - Female support
 - Leader/follower
 - Men get credit for female success
 - Sexuality
 - Heterosexual
 - Family and procreation
 - Reverse stereotypes as humor
 - Masculine woman
 - Feminine man
 - Male savior
 - Women need their job done for them
 - Women need things explained to them (mansplaining)
 - Male gaze
 - Women are sex objects
 - Women are objects
 - Women are talked over/about/butt of jokes
 - Rape culture
 - Violence against women
 - Female blaming
 - Casual sexism/language

APPENDIX B

MASTER OUTLINE FOR THE *NIKKI HEAT* NOVELS

- The Ideal Woman
 - Physical attributes
 - Physical appearance
 - Race
 - Body image
 - Attire
 - Bodily functions
 - Sexualizing sweat (and other activities)
 - Femininity
 - Perfect life
 - Mothering
 - Emotional displays
 - Angry
 - Jealous/judgmental
 - Insecure
 - Friendships
 - One of the boys (but not too much)
 - Power and strength
 - Robot
 - Sexuality
 - Constantly aroused
 - Heterosexual
- Power and Dominance
 - Situational control
 - Body language
 - Shape, size, build
 - Aggressive stance
 - Overpowering physically
 - Language
 - Manipulation
 - Lying
 - Threats
 - Sexual advantage
 - Threats/aggression
 - Sexual favors
 - The Ideal Woman in Leadership
 - Can't/shouldn't
 - Consistent failure
 - Told to quit

- Cracking under pressure
 - Blaming others
 - Aggressive tantrums
 - Successful
 - Bossy
 - Hegemonic ideology
 - Sexuality
 - Heterosexual majority
 - Reverse stereotypes as humor
 - Feminine male
 - Masculine female
 - Male gaze
 - Women as objects
 - Lewd comments
 - Lustful appraisal
 - Nudity and language
 - Sexualization of female body
 - At home
 - At work
 - In public
 - Rape culture
 - Violence against women as plot point
 - Casual sexism
 - Male savior
 - Women need protection
 - Women need their job done for them
 - Women need things explained to them

APPENDIX C

COLOR CODED THEMATIC OUTLINE ARRANGED ACCORDING TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Yellow: Castle

Blue: Nikki Heat

Green: Both

RQ1: How do the *Castle/Nikki Heat* narratives represent femininity and masculinity and how have these narratives evolved throughout the series?

- Femininity
 - Physically
 - Attractive
 - Body
 - Attire/makeup
 - Diverse
 - Fit
 - Bodily functions
 - Sexualizing sweat (and other activities)
 - Personality
 - Emotional displays
 - Frustrated/scolding/angry
 - Hysterical
 - Jealous
 - Insecure
 - Territorial
 - Judgmental
 - Body image
 - Slut shaming
- Masculinity
 - Physically
 - Attractive
 - Healthy/fit
 - Attire
 - Diverse
 - Personality
 - Egotistical/prideful
 - Likes/interests
 - Immature
 - Sexuality
 - Fragile masculinity revealed

RQ2: How does the multiplatform fictional reality convey notions of womanhood, identity, and authority?

- Ideal Woman
 - Perfect life
 - Motherly/protective
 - Sexuality
 - Constantly aroused
 - Heterosexual
- Leader/follower
 - Female leadership
 - Can't/shouldn't
 - Consistent failure
 - Told to quit
 - Cracking under pressure
 - Blaming others
 - Aggressive tantrums
 - Successful
 - Men get credit for female success
 - Female support

RQ3: How is power and powerlessness negotiated in the *Castle/Nikki Heat* phenomenon?

- Power and dominance
 - Girl power
 - Physical appearance/body language
 - Sexualization as a tool for control
 - Threats/aggression
 - Sexual favors
 - Stance/position/movement
 - Robot
 - Physically overpowering
 - Language and manipulation
 - Tone
 - Threats
 - Lying
 - Emotions
 - Power in name only
 - Man power
 - Social structure
 - Body language
 - Size
 - Stance
 - Language
 - Sexualization
 - Threats/aggression

RQ 4: How does contextual framing influence the discourse between characters in the televised fictional setting versus the literary fictional setting?

- Hegemonic ideology
 - Stereotypes
 - Gender roles
 - Relationship rules
 - Sexuality
 - Heterosexual
 - Family and procreation
 - Reverse stereotypes as humor
 - Masculine woman
 - Feminine man
 - Male gaze
 - Objectification
 - Women are sex objects
 - Women are objects
 - Women are talked over/about/butt of jokes
 - Male savior
 - Women need their job done for them
 - Women need things explained to them (mansplaining)
 - Women need protection
 - Rape culture
 - Violence against women
 - Female blaming
 - Casual sexism/language

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