The Girl in the Cellar:
Media Representations of
Natascha Kampusch

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Abstract

This article examines the media coverage of the Natascha Kampusch case, a high-profile Austrian abduction case, in a sample of 355 newspaper articles from 21 English language newspapers over a four-year period, from 2006 to 2010. Natascha Kampusch was kidnapped by Wolfgang Priklopil in 1998, when she was 10 years old. Eight years after her abduction, Kampusch escaped. Priklopil committed suicide later that day. This article analyses the narratives used to describe Kampusch in Western news media. She initially received sympathy from the media and the public. Kampusch did not, however, embody the qualities expected of a victim. In public statements, she asserted her agency and independence and expressed her ambivalence towards her kidnapper. This article argues that Kampusch's failure to approximate a familiar narrative of victimhood provoked a backlash against her. The narratives employed to describe Kampusch were limited, conflicting, highly gendered and sometimes hostile, as mainstream media discourse struggled to fit her into an acceptable construction of female victimhood. This article highlights the inconsistencies, assumptions and dangers inherent in popular cultural narratives of femininity. Finally, in offering a critique of the standard narratives employed in the news media, this article draws from Kampusch's autobiography *3,096 Days*, in which she explicitly engages with and critiques the problematic portrayals so frequent in media representations of the case, and offers an alternative interpretation of victimhood.

Introduction

> Only gradually did I notice that I had slipped into a new prison.
> Inch by inch, the walls that replaced my dungeon became visible …
> The sympathy extended to a victim is deceptive.
>
> Natasha Kampusch 2010:235

This article explores the role of narrative in constructing, defining and delimiting victimhood. The familiar stories, stereotypical characters and cultural myths that are drawn upon in narrating the female victim both reinforce and create the shared social understandings of gendered violence and its victims. In this article, I examine one particular case — the kidnapping of Natasha Kampusch — and the media's struggle to reconcile this traumatic crime and its complex victim into a familiar narrative.

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There has been intense media attention in the past two decades on each of a spate of cases involving individuals who had been kidnapped by strangers or imprisoned by their fathers and held captive for an extended period of time. The Kampusch case is extreme, but not unique; other cases include that of Sabine Dardenne in Belgium; Lydia Gouardo in France; Fusako Sano in Japan; the 'Moe incest case' in Australia; Elizabeth Fritzl in Austria; the Mongelli case in Italy; Elizabeth Smart and Jaycee Lee Dugard in the United States; and, most recently, Amanda Berry, Gina DeJesus and Michelle Knight in Cleveland. The reaction to the Kampusch case is striking in that Kampusch became a controversial figure who inspired mixed and sometimes hostile reactions from the media and the public.[1]

Natascha Kampusch was kidnapped by Wolfgang Priklopil on 2 March 1998, in Austria, when she was 10 years old. Held captive in his cellar for six months, she was gradually allowed into the house, where he forced her to perform domestic duties. After years of captivity, he occasionally took her out of the house. Eight years after the kidnapping, while Kampusch was vacuuming his car, Priklopil moved away to take a phone call and Kampusch escaped. Priklopil committed suicide later that day.

The reaction towards Kampusch was initially sympathetic, but nonetheless entailed a specific representation of victimhood that depicted Kampusch as weak and disordered. However, Kampusch was calm, self-assured, media savvy and resourceful. It soon became apparent that she intended to manage her own image and tell her story on her own terms. She explicitly rejected psychiatric labels and criticised the press for its representations of her. She also expressed an ambivalent attitude towards Priklopil and refused to describe him as 'evil'. There were soon criticisms of the fact that she failed to escape on any of the occasions that she left the house with Priklopil. The media and public began to react with hostility to her failure to behave as a victim, blaming her for her fate and accusing her of dishonesty. Kampusch did not fit within the relatively uncomplicated and widely accepted understanding of victimhood, and when her statements turned out to be 'complicated and unsettling', the initial sympathy displayed towards her quickly 'turned to disgust and confusion and she began getting hate mail' (Ronson 2010). The conflicting narratives the media employed in their struggle to position this atypical victim relied on a range of assumptions and stereotypical narratives that position female victims as disordered or as manipulative, as complicit romantic partners or as sexualised objects. Priklopil's suicide made a court case relating to the abduction unnecessary. The absence of a legal narrative from which to draw may have encouraged a particular reliance upon employing stereotypical narratives and stock characters to tell the story of the abduction.

The simplistic and sometimes negative portrayals employed to characterise Kampusch in the media are not the only ones available. Some reporters portrayed Kampusch in a positive light and some critiqued the dominant media representations of her. Kampusch herself engaged with and rejected media representations of the case in her autobiography, *3,096 Days*, published in September 2010. In these alternative representations, Kampusch was portrayed as a strong and rational woman who coped admirably in a situation of extreme oppression. Kampusch's narrative of events in her autobiography rejected the dominant media discourse and highlighted its limitations.

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[1]   While these cases have occurred in a variety of countries, this study and its conclusions are limited to English-speaking media. The case covered is Austrian and it is possible that there are some cultural assumptions or prejudices by anglophone journalists and their audiences in the treatment of this story.

Background

Media discourse and victims

Over the past few decades, victims have taken on an increasing significance in media discourse, the popular imagination and policy debate around crime (Greer 2007:21; Reiner and Livingstone 1997:7; Walklate 2009:7). Victims have become increasingly visible in media portrayals of crime and a particular construction of victimhood has developed in the public sphere (Rentschler 2007). This construction is relevant to cultural understandings of femininity. While women are under-represented in news media in general, they are over-represented as victims, to the point that the role of 'victim' is one of the most popular roles in which women are characterised in news media reports (Global Media Monitoring Project 2010).

News media play a key role in forming society's popular beliefs around crime and violence, including attitudes towards male violence against women and its victims. Individuals construct their understanding of the world — their socially constructed reality — by combining their direct experience with their symbolic reality (that which they believe to be true, but have not directly experienced) (Surette 2007). Many individuals do not have much direct experience to draw on to construct their understanding of violent crime and victimisation, and the media becomes a key source of information (Chermak 1994; Foss 2012). In advanced societies, media provides the broadly shared, common knowledge and dominates the formation of symbolic reality (Johson-Cartee 2005; Surette 2007:32).[2] An analysis of the media construction of victimhood is therefore important in terms of understanding how the role of the 'victim' is commonly understood.

In reporting an event, a simplified version of the event is frequently constructed and a consensus about the meaning of the event is encouraged. Journalists need to provide a brief, simple version of events that their readership can easily follow (Jewkes 2011:47). A consensus about the meaning of the event is sought such that 'the range of possible meanings inherent in the story must be restricted … news discourse is generally not open to interpretation and audiences are invited to come to consensual conclusions about a story' (Jewkes 2011:47). An event with a clear interpretation that is free from ambiguity is preferred when reporting news (Galtung and Ruge 1965:66). In simplifying the event and encouraging consensus, reporters often construct a binary, 'good' and 'evil' representation of events that gives news stories resonance with the public and sustains news value (Coe et al 2004; Jewkes 2011:49).

As well as simplifying events, journalists will emphasise that which makes events extraordinary or unusual. This can lead to a tendency to remove the case from an understanding that incorporates an examination of inequality. The focus on what makes crimes unusual and/or sensational and thus newsworthy 'obscures systemic patterns of violence against women' (Klein 2003:93). There is little critical analysis, violence is

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[2] The media's dominant role in creating symbolic reality in modern society, does not translate simplistically into some form of media mind control. As Van Dijk (1995:11) argues:

> despite the pervasive symbolic power of the media, the audience will generally retain a minimum of autonomy and independence, and engage more or less actively, instead of purely passively, in the 'use' of the means of mass communication. In other words, whatever, the symbolic power of the news media, at least some media users will generally be able to 'resist' such persuasion.

While this article focuses on the dominant framings used in media portrayals, and assumes that this on some level influences popular understanding, the complexity of how an individual would engage with these texts should not be underestimated.

decontextualised and the individual act of violence is focused on, while underlying societal causes are avoided (Dowler 2004). As Hodkinson argues, a key criterion for news selection is the extent to which a story can be represented by focusing on the 'intentions, actions and emotions of individuals. Rather than emphasizing the determination of individual lives by structural forces … news tends to present us with a world dominated by individual morals, decisions and behaviour' (2011:133). Much news coverage of criminal victimisation thus 'both reflects and reinforces social divisions and inequalities, and in so doing feeds into the wider structures of power, dominance and subjugation from which they arrive' (Greer 2007:42).

Narrative

This study examines the narratives most frequently employed by reporters to describe the victim in the Kampusch case. In so doing, this article assumes that the media is not conspiratorial and that journalists draw from the same broadly shared 'symbolic reality' as the rest of us. The aim of this article is to highlight which narratives and stories are employed most readily by journalists in order to shed some light on what are the most accepted and 'commonsensical' understandings of victimhood and, in particular, of female victims of male violence. The selection and framing of events is not arbitrary, but is based on understandings, myths and stereotypes of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality, violence and victimhood. The media presents women crime victims in stereotypic ways that embed these victims' stories within prevailing cultural constructions of gender (Cavender and Bond-Maupin 1999).

When reporting news, the reporter practices a form of storytelling in which standard character types and familiar storylines are drawn upon to make sense of an event to readers. As Tuchman (1976:93) states: 'Reports of news events are stories — no more, but no less'. In interpreting an event, reporters have to rely on a certain level of prior understanding from readers. Familiar narrative scripts and characters are invoked to help the reader make sense of events that may otherwise be complex or unfamiliar (Green 2009; Hanson 2001; Kitch 2002; Lule 2001). As Kitch (2002) observes, narrative and myth serve to give 'meaning to individual news events by placing them within a broader temporal and cultural structure and therefore making them seem logical' (2002:296). Journalists draw from the stories and symbols available in broader culture and familiar to their readership in order to construct a narrative that will resonate with readers (Barnett 2006; Burns 2002; Fisher 1985a, 1985b; Kitch 2002).

This article examines the most frequently used narratives and explores dominant media framings of female victims of male violence. However, as Greer notes, there is much variability within the media, and representations that generalise about the prejudices of the media are dangerous (2007:43). While this article largely discusses the most common narratives employed by the media to construct Kampusch, the media is not homogeneous and there were alternative narratives that did not construct Kampusch as a 'typical victim' or did not condemn her for not fulfilling this role. While these reports were in the minority, there were several journalists who wrote articles that constructed Kampusch as a heroic character and others that directly criticised the dominant narratives that were more frequently being employed. Thus, while this article refers to 'dominant media discourse', there are also alternative voices in the media.

The 'ideal' victim

Since Christie's (1986) conceptualisation of the 'ideal victim', there have been feminist critiques of the problematic limitations of how victimhood is understood in contemporary

society. Christie drew attention to the fact that victim status is not applied to all victims. His concept thus sought to identify 'a person or category of person who — when hit by crime — most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim' (1986:18). Christie argued that the attributes of an 'ideal victim' include the following: they are weak; they are carrying out a respectable project; they are where they could not possibly be blamed for being; the offender was big and bad; and the offender was unknown to the victim (1986). The application of victim status is therefore not straightforward and depends on the cultural and discursive milieu in which the identity construction is taking place. Victims who can more readily be constructed within familiar cultural narratives of victimhood are more likely to be acknowledged.

The assignation of 'victim' status is particularly problematic in terms of victims of gendered violence. They are prone to being discredited as victims, with women's actual experiences of male violence rarely putting them in the category of the 'ideal victim'. The narrow construction of legitimate victimhood has serious implications for women and for societal understanding of gendered violence. Crimes against non-ideal victims are not taken seriously and gender stereotypes are reinforced in representations of these victims (Greer 2007; Gruber 2009; Randall 2010). The division between ideal and non-ideal victims also implies a code of behaviour — 'avoid the streets, stay inside, avoid strangers, dress properly' (Madriz 1997:354) — which can be understood as a form of social control for all women and which is apparent in press coverage of sexual violence against women (Korn and Efrat 2004; Sampert 2010). Legal and media narratives of domestic violence and 'femicide' frequently rely on cultural assumptions about masculinity and femininity wherein male violence is expected, and females are attributed some level of blame depending on their performance of appropriate femininity (Tyson 2013:6). Male violence against women is narrated in a way that 'allows a man to become a certain kind of narratable subject, a much-put-upon man, while his victims — traditionally, a nagging, unfaithful or departing wife … are transformed into an annihilated "what"' (Howe 2010:210).

Contemporary feminist critiques of victimhood

Recently, studies of victimhood have sought to not just explore who is (or is not) assigned the status of the 'worthy' victim, but also to highlight how the role of the 'victim' comes with a set of expectations attached. One aspect of the gendered construction of the 'ideal victim' that has received criticism from feminist theorists is the prevalence of narratives of violence that deploy a simple dichotomous construction of victim and agent (Morrissey 2003; Picart 2003; Stubbs and Tolmie 2008). Our current cultural understanding of a victim is that of one who has no agency — the terms 'victim' and 'agent' are employed as mutually exclusive (Mahoney 1994). This does not reflect women's lived experiences of violence and frequently requires them to offer a simplified and sanitised narrative in order to conform to expectations of what victimhood should be. Further, as Morrissey argues, highly gendered and limited media narratives that deny female agency have problematic consequences for all women: 'These stories affect the representation of women in general and the meaning of the feminine because they deny female agency and a concept of women as active, human subjects' (2003:17).

There has been a significant shift in how victims have been thought about in past decades. While there is less overt victim-blaming, victims are required to be 'pure, innocent, blameless and free of problems (before the abuse)' (Lamb 1999:108). In this construction of victimhood, suffering is emphasised and passivity is expected. van Dijk's (2009) analysis of media portrayals of crime victims shows that those who do not play their constructed role appropriately are disciplined. This limited construction of victimhood is in part political:

'a fearful, passive victim in need of help is a more convenient person for support agencies and government alike to manage than an angry one, actively seeking revenge and blaming the government for the poor quality of support and protection given' (van Dijk 2006:17). Thus, while the 'victim' is a powerful symbol and can be used for political purposes, there is a tendency to ignore the context within which crime occurs. As Shapiro argues, the victims' rights movement 'cloisters crime from broader social or economic forces' (1997:16). Victims are often used to appeal to the emotions of media consumers (Rentschler 2007). However, the specific construction of victimhood that has been hailed into prominence is often divorced from its social context.

Research design

This study employed a content analysis of the frequency with which different narrative frames were employed in describing the Kampusch case, as well as an examination of these narratives. These narratives were explored in terms of what they can reveal about popular conceptions of victimhood. The aim of such narrative analysis is to reveal the hidden motivations behind a text by 'deconstructing ideas, belief-systems, or generally held social values and assumptions' (Jewkes 2011:248).

The sample used in this study comprised 355 articles. The sample includes all the articles about the case dating from Kampusch's escape in August 2006 until November 2010 from 21 English-language newspapers.[3] This sample of newspapers includes leftist and conservative publications, as well as tabloid and broadsheet publications and includes all the major metropolitan Australian newspapers,[4] the 10 highest-circulating newspapers in England and the 10 highest-circulating newspapers in the United States[5] that contained relevant articles. The highest-circulating newspapers from Canada, Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland were also included. A search was conducted on the newspapers' websites, as well as through news databases Newsbank and Factiva. Articles of fewer than 100 words and articles in which the Kampusch case was not the key story were omitted. The study aimed to examine the similar and repeated narratives that permeated much of the reporting throughout all the publications.

In order to observe how the media reaction to Kampusch developed over time, the articles were sorted into three time periods — the initial reaction in the month following her escape (23 August to 22 September 2006); subsequent media coverage (23 September 2006 to 31 August 2010) and finally articles published following the publication of her book, *3,096 Days* (1 September to 10 November 2010). The frequency with which the key narratives of the 'bad' woman, the 'mad' woman, the 'sex slave' and the 'virgin bride' were employed was examined. Differences in the narratives employed in the first and second time periods demonstrate how the media portrayal of Kampusch transformed in reaction to Kampusch's atypical victim behaviour. These narratives are analysed in terms of the limited construction of victimhood in media discourse. The differences between representations in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers are outlined and the media reports during the first two

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3   *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Belfast Telegraph*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Courier Mail*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *Daily Record*, *The Daily Telegraph* (Australia), *The Daily Telegraph* (UK), *The Guardian*, *The Herald Sun*, *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Sun*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Times*, *The Toronto Star* and *The Washington Post*.

4   The author is Australian and initially examined all major Australian metropolitan newspapers before widening the search to include a wider variety and number of articles, hence the large number of Australian newspapers included.

5   Some publications did not contain articles on the case and were excluded from the sample.

time periods in which Kampusch was portrayed in a positive light are discussed. Finally, the counter-narrative Kampusch constructed in *3,096 Days* and the impact the publication of this book had on media representations of the case is explored through analysis of the employment of the key narratives in the third time period.

Results

Content analysis

Table 1: Frequency with which each narrative frame is employed to describe Kampusch in each time period

Narrative	Time period 1 (n=155)	Time period 2 (n=168)	Time period 3 (n=32)	Total (n=355)
'Mad' woman	67 (43%)	29 (17%)	3 (9%)	99 (28%)
'Bad' woman	9 (6%)	42 (25%)	2 (6%)	53 (15%)
'Sex slave'	30 (19%)	36 (21%)	0	66 (19%)
'Virgin bride'	22 (14%)	34 (20%)	1 (3%)	57 (16%)
Positive	9 (6%)	6 (4%)	11 (34%)	26 (7%)
Other	6 (4%)	35 (21%)	1 (3%)	42 (12%)
No key six	58 (37%)	63 (38%)	27 (84%)	148 (42%)

A close reading of the articles in the sample led to identification of six key narrative frames that were used to make sense of the case, four of which specifically sought to describe Kampusch. I refer to these four as the 'mad' woman, 'bad' woman, 'sex slave' and 'virgin bride'. The other narrative frames did not have Kampusch as their focus and were therefore not included in this study.

The narrative frame that positioned Kampusch as 'mad' was the most commonly used frame in the month following her escape and was employed in 43 per cent of the articles. In this initial time period, only six per cent of articles portrayed Kampusch as 'bad'. In the second time period, the percentage of articles that employed the narrative of the 'mad' woman was less than half that of the first period (17 per cent) and the articles that did employ this narrative were less sympathetic. The media backlash to Kampusch is evident in that articles that portrayed Kampusch as 'bad' doubled in the second time period, with 25 per cent discussing her behaviour in a negative way and representing her as manipulative or deceitful.

The proportion of articles that employed the language of the 'sex slave' narrative — describing the case in an explicitly sexual way — increased very slightly from 19 per cent in the month following Kampusch's escape to 21 per cent in the time period thereafter. Note, however, that almost all of the articles that employed the language of the 'sex slave' narrative in the first month only made brief mention of Kampusch as a 'sex slave', often in the headline. However, in the later time period, many articles discussed supposed sexual detail of the case throughout the text of the piece. Finally, the 'virgin bride' narrative described the case as a twisted romance. The frequency with which this narrative was employed also increased over time, from 14 per cent in the first time period to 20 per cent in the second.

Representations in tabloid and broadsheet publications

Table 2: Narratives employed in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers

Narrative	Tabloid (n=145)	Broadsheet (n=210)
'Mad' Woman	50 (34%)	49 (23%)
'Bad' Woman	22 (15%)	31 (15%)
'Virgin bride'	33 (23%)	24 (11%)
'Sex slave'	39 (27%)	27 (13%)
Positive	5 (3%)	21 (10%)

This article seeks to highlight the common narratives that frequently resurfaced in reports of the Kampusch case. In so doing, however, I do not mean to suggest that the media is a monolithic, homogeneous entity. A significant number of articles do not employ any of the six key narratives I identified (42 per cent). It is also important to observe the differences between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.[6] The narrative of the 'bad' woman was employed at the same rate in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers (15 per cent) while the narrative of the 'mad' woman was employed more frequently in tabloid newspapers (34 per cent compared to 24 per cent). The frequency with which the narratives of the 'sex slave' and the 'virgin bride' were employed in tabloid newspapers (27 per cent and 23 per cent respectively) was more than twice that of their frequency in broadsheets (11 per cent and 10 per cent). Positive representations were more than three times more likely in articles from broadsheet newspapers (10 per cent as opposed to 3 per cent).

Reporters for tabloid newspapers tend to report events in a more simplistic and sensational way than those writing for broadsheet newspapers (Boykoff 2008; Williams and Dickinson 1993) and are more likely to adopt a more informal, opinionated style aimed at the 'construction of sensation and emotion' (Hodkinson 2011:139). This may explain the more frequent use in the tabloid papers of the simplistic narratives that sought to position Kampusch in a both a sensationalised and stereotyped way. It is of particular interest, however, that the tabloid papers were far more likely to utilise the two narratives ('sex slave' and 'virgin bride') that are not only the most explicitly gendered representations of Kampusch but also the ones that reveal the most about popular conceptions of heterosexual interactions and gendered violence. As Boykoff points out, broadsheets have a reputation for being primary influencers on policy and decision-making, but tabloids, which are far more widely read than broadsheets, need to be engaged with when considering links between media representations and informal spaces of discourse (2008:551).

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[6]   For the purposes of this study, newspapers that are considered broadsheet quality but are now published in compact format were considered broadsheet newspapers.

Narrative analysis and discussion

'Mad or bad'

The narrative frame of the 'mad woman' was the frame most frequently employed in initial media reactions to the case. The construction of victimhood underpinning this narrative dictated that Kampusch must undoubtedly be psychologically damaged by her ordeal — despite the fact that her behaviour tended to indicate the contrary. This frame frequently involved the diagnosis of 'Stockholm Syndrome' to explain Kampusch's behaviour, the symptoms of which supposedly manifested in such a wide variety of behaviours that the diagnosis was even used to explain the fact that Kampusch appeared calm and stable: One reporter suggested that 'Stockholm Syndrome' may explain why Kampusch was 'cool, calm' and made 'no enraged denunciation of her abductor' (Hurst 2006). Some reporters acknowledged that Kampusch did not seem overly traumatised, but insisted that this calm state must be the result of denial or a fabrication. Readers were warned that 'her apparent strength and outgoing personality may hide a fragile nature still terribly damaged by her ordeal' (Davis 2007). The assumed inevitability of a victim's 'disordered' state was also apparent when reporters conceded that Kampusch may not fit the diagnosis of 'Stockholm Syndrome', but suggested that there was surely a bigger and better syndrome that could be created in order to diagnose her. The case was described as 'worthy of a syndrome all of its own which … will take many years to define and understand' (Smith 2006).

The conviction that Kampusch was suffering from 'Stockholm Syndrome' in media representations of the case undermined her interpretation of events by pre-emptively denying her potential to be rational. Further, the media discourse on the case presented the diagnosis as unproblematic when — as Namnyak et al's 2008 review of the existing literature on Stockholm Syndrome demonstrated — there is ambiguity between the papers, no validated criteria has been described and there is little published academic research on 'Stockholm Syndrome'. The reliance on this diagnosis to explain Kampusch's behaviour can be understood as part of the tendency in popular discourse to assume that female victims of male violence are psychologically damaged. As Lamb argues, the public and the media 'seem to want to diagnose all victims as suffering from a syndrome, whether they fit the pattern or not' (1996:90). There are dangers in the reliance on medical categories to explain the behaviour of victims: the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, the denial of women's agency and the pathologisation of reasonable reactions to male violence as 'symptoms' or 'syndromes' (Allen 1987; Orenstein 2009; Stubbs 1991). Violence against women becomes understood as a mental health problem, rather than as a social problem, and a limited and inaccurate view of how a victim can behave is constructed. The fact that empirical conventional psychology shows that some women are not enduringly traumatised by abuse is rarely spoken about (Gavey 2005). The narrative of the suffering victim is nonetheless familiar and was therefore swiftly and frequently employed by journalists in making sense of the Kampusch case. This presupposition of psychological damage and the reliance on mental health professionals to explain Kampusch's behaviour must be understood within the context of a broad pattern of pathologising women's reactions to male violence that results in the negation of society's responsibility to respond to the broader issues influencing violence against women and children.

In discussing the narrative of the 'bad' woman, I am referring to the articles published about Kampusch that aimed to elicit a negative response from the reader by portraying her as greedy, manipulative, self-serving or deceitful. Such articles became increasingly prominent in the media following Kampusch's self-representation in the media as a calm

and self-assured woman, and her rejection of the label of 'Stockholm Syndrome'. Kampusch's failure to live up to the role of the disordered and passive victim provoked this negative reaction in dominant media discourse. While the positioning of female victims as pathological is established in the literature, the way in which Kampusch received such a hostile reaction for refusing to embody this role was striking. Kampusch's public statements challenged the simplistic construction of victimhood. In a letter read to journalists, she rejected the statement that she was 'dominated' by Priklopil and argued that '[h]e was not my master, although he wanted that. I was just as strong' (Associated Press 2006). She was also assertive in her attitude towards the media, stating that while she understood the curiosity about her case, she would not answer intimate questions and would pursue with all legal means any invasion of her privacy.

Reporters described Kampusch as being 'all too keen to profit' (Jones 2008) from her ordeal and she was criticised for her 'litigiousness', which was argued to be to be 'more about money than good reputation, fairness or accuracy' (Traynor 2006). It was alleged that Kampusch's bank account was 'full with the millions she made from the media' and she was 'regularly seen shopping in Vienna's swankiest shops' (Michner 2007). Kampusch was described as calculating, implying that being media savvy did not befit a victim. Reporters argued that there had been 'a little too much of Natascha in the media, of Natascha pontificating about Austria, of Natascha's ordeal and people's reaction to it' (Boggan and Leidig 2010). Some media reports suggested that Kampusch's version of the story was not the truth. When police opened a criminal probe into the Kampusch case, Hall (2008) stated that this probe should be seen as 'effectively branding the girl in the cellar a liar'. (This probe eventually confirmed Kampusch's version of events (Mail Foreign Service 2010)). In criticising Kampusch, Jones (2008) argued that: 'No doubt she was sincere … when offering to counsel Elisabeth Fritzl and her hapless netherworld children — but quite how anyone [would] benefit from her persistent refusal to address publicly the full truth of her experience is anyone's guess.' However, the benefits of public disclosure in such a situation are highly questionable. For example, Patty Hearst (whose 1974 abduction attracted intense media interest) recommended to Elizabeth Smart that she should not go public with the details of what had happened to her: 'Knowing now what I knew then, I just wouldn't even tell anybody about it. The questioning was so brutal. It was horrific, and it just isn't worth it' (Kohn 2003).

The media distrusted Kampusch because she failed to act in a way consistent with our limited conceptualisation of victimhood in that she disavowed the label of Stockholm Syndrome and insisted upon representing herself as calm and rational. She thus failed to fit into a familiar narrative of victimhood and trauma. The highly critical representations of Kampusch in the narrative frame of the 'bad woman' demonstrate the dangers inherent in a simplistic construction of victims as entirely innocent, passive and suffering. A woman who does not embody this ideal becomes suspect — as though, if she is not damaged enough or does not appear to be suffering enough, she cannot 'really' have been victimised. The limited role afforded victims is implied in Smith's (2006) observation that Kampusch had been 'given too much control, which allowed her to behave more like hot media property than the victim of an unimaginable trauma'. Despite apparent sympathy for victims of gendered violence, there remains some blame towards its victims and an expectation that they feel a certain level of shame.

Sex slave and virgin bride

The two additional frames analysed in this article are those of the 'sex slave' and the 'virgin bride'. While these narrative frames were employed less frequently than those of the 'mad'

or 'bad' woman, they help demonstrate the media's tendency to draw on familiar cultural narratives and stock characters to 'make sense' of gendered violence and its victims.

From the outset, reporters speculated on and were intrigued by the prospect of potential sexual abuse in the Kampusch case. In the first month after her escape, this speculation was intertwined with the narrative of the 'mad' woman. Kampusch was positioned as a woman who was most likely traumatised as a result of probable sexual abuse. When Kampusch did not behave as a victim was expected to, and, in particular, when she refused to divulge the details of her experience, the tone of the articles changed. The narrative of the 'sex slave' gained momentum at the same time as that of the 'bad' woman. This narrative reduced Kampusch to a (highly sexualised) object of abuse and raised allegations of abuse prior to her kidnapping with the implication that Kampusch somehow contributed to her own fate. Kampusch has recently publicly acknowledged that she was raped by Priklopil. Ironically, while she used to be criticised for refusing to address the issue, she is now being criticised for addressing the issue (see, for example, Mollard 2013).

After the first month following her escape, media reports began to employ increasingly gratuitous and sexual representations of Kampusch. She was described as a 'Tragic sex kidnap victim' (Mirror.co.uk 2008) and as 'kidnapped, caged and abused' (McCaffrey 2007). Other headlines included: 'Dungeon girl pervs cover-up' (France 2008) and 'Cellar girl had romped with perv' (Hughes 2008). Several media reports repeated allegations that other men were involved in abusing Kampusch. Smith (2006) referred to Priklopil getting Kampusch involved in 'sadomasochistic sexual activity that was shared with others'. France (2008) stated that photos 'showing kidnap girl Natascha Kampusch being used as a sex slave by paedophiles' had been 'deliberately hidden by cops to avoid a political scandal' and told readers that these photos showed Kampusch 'being handcuffed and made to join in "cruel games" with other perverts'.

Some reporters described a set of photographs that were taken of Kampusch prior to the kidnapping in a gratuitously sexual way. The photographs, taken by a young female family member several years before the kidnapping (Smith 2006b), were shown by Kampusch's mother to a journalist a few days after Kampusch's disappearance, who then had them published in a Vienna newspaper (McCaffrey 2007). These photos became frequently discussed as the media reaction to Kampusch became increasingly negative and her credibility routinely questioned. One report in *The Australian* (2008) described them as 'lurid photographs of the girl, wearing lipstick and riding boots, brandishing a whip and showing her private parts'. As well as being represented in such a way as to titillate the reader, the descriptions of the 'sexual' photographs were used by some reporters to imply that there was something about Kampusch that led to her selection as a kidnap victim. Smith (2006) stated that:

> Perhaps there was something about her that, unwittingly, drew his predatory attention. There is a series of photographs of Natascha … which show her in provocative poses that some people think are inappropriately sexual. She was said to be a vivacious, outgoing child, and this too may have been a lure to a paedophile.

Several reporters also claimed that Kampusch was sexually abused prior to her captivity. Some reporters alleged that she had been sexually abused by her mother (a frequent allegation; for one example see Hall 2008); 'used by paedophiles' (McCaffrey 2007); or 'forced into sex before her kidnapping' (Connolly 2007). These representations served to construct Kampusch as already 'damaged' and were used to suggest that this makes her less worthy of sympathy. One article stated that the allegations of abuse by Kampusch's mother and others had 'changed public perceptions of Natascha and her family' and that the 'public

who took her to their hearts' now felt 'betrayed … Behind all the controversy lies a clearly damaged young woman' (McCaffrey 2007).

The tone of the most gratuitous articles can be understood as an effort to titillate readers and sell newspapers, yet the consequence of such representations is to depoliticise gendered violence and present it as voyeuristic entertainment, rather than as an example of an endemic social problem. Further, these portrayals of Kampusch reflect a historical tendency to hold child sexual abuse victims partly to blame for their abuse because of their 'seductiveness' (Bolen 2001). The focus placed on the victim's behaviour deflects attention from the perpetrator's responsibility for his actions, as well as from the social and political context in which gendered violence occurs. The media construction of Kampusch — a woman who had supposedly been sexually abused prior to her kidnapping — as 'damaged' suggests the employment of what Curtis-Webber describes as 'the Victorian notion that a woman wronged becomes a woman ruined: her testimony as well as her actions are no longer to be trusted' (1995:45). Such a myth, and the dichotomy it upholds between 'pure' and 'impure' women, leads to a 'narrative of punishment' that underscores public discourse on women perceived to be 'impure' and is apparent in the media's demonisation of victims of sexual abuse (Valenti 2009:14).

The virgin bride

While the 'sex slave' narrative positioned Priklopil as a predatory paedophile and Kampusch as an abused (albeit seductive) child, the 'virgin bride' narrative depicted their relationship as a romance. Priklopil was, according to this frame, a man on a desperate search for a wife, while Kampusch's complicity was emphasised — she was supposedly in love with him, and the domesticity of their life together was foregrounded.

Invoking fairytale imagery and romantic clichés, this narrative frame involved an understanding of heterosexual relationships that was both stereotypical and troubling. From the moment Kampusch expressed some grief at Priklopil's death, the media was challenged by the complexity of their relationship and some reporters presented it as a bizarre love story. Several articles described Priklopil's supposed motivations for the kidnapping using clichéd phrases from familiar narratives of heterosexual love. In one article, readers were informed that Priklopil had been planning a 'white wedding' with Kampusch at the time of her escape (Mail Foreign Service 2010). Another article described how he chose a child because he wanted an 'untouched virgin bride' and had believed that they would 'live happily' together (Mirror.co.uk 2010). Some articles cast Priklopil as a Pygmalion-type figure, trying to craft himself an ideal partner. According to Hall (2010), he had taken 'a 10-year-old girl in order for her to grow into the "perfect woman"'. Hall argued that, since his ideal woman did not exist, Priklopil had needed 'to fashion her for himself' and wondered whether Priklopil had seen the cellar as 'a workshop in which to craft the woman of his dreams'.

Several reporters asserted that Kampusch had reciprocated Priklopil's romantic feelings. Hall stated that 'the relationship in the house Ms Kampusch shared with Priklopil evolved into a kind of love' (2008) and that 'a strange love affair did eventually grow up between Priklopil and Ms Kampusch' (2010). Boyes (2006) called Kampusch a 'little girl lost who found a strange soulmate in her kidnapper'. The domesticity of the relationship between Kampusch and Priklopil was foregrounded by some reporters who employed descriptions that likened them to a typical couple. Smith (2006) suggested that 'Natascha was sometimes like a housewife'. Campbell (2006) described how she 'learned how to cook from books and would often make dinner, sometimes writing a shopping list of ingredients she needed', while at night 'he would invite her upstairs to watch a video'. These references to cooking

and watching videos together are used to imply a consensual construction of hetero-normative domesticity.

These articles construct a troubling picture of heterosexual romance. The uncritical way in which media reports interpreted the case as a story of masculine desire implied that it was understandable for a man to want a submissive, virginal bride. It was Priklopil's manner of procuring one that was constructed as problematic. The manner in which this narrative frame transformed kidnap and cruelty into a love story also reflects some of the problematic notions that underpin stereotypical 'romance' narratives. As Jackson notes, the classical romance narrative 'emphasizes a femininity characterized by nurturance, submission and selflessness, as well as reinforcing the fusion of love and violence. Dominating behaviour is portrayed as an expression of love' (2001:307). Traditional constructions have often framed women's 'inherent wish to be subjugated' as an important element in male violence (Regehr and Glancy 1993:309). The media representation of the Kampusch case demonstrates that a dominant/submissive understanding of heterosexual love is often present in media discourse on gendered violence, even if it no longer constitutes the *dominant* framework for looking at such cases.

The emphasis on the domestic details of Priklopil's and Kampusch's lives and interactions and the downplaying of Priklopil's violence allowed for an interpretation of the case that undermined the seriousness and violence of Priklopil's behaviour. The underlying assumption behind these articles is that it is natural for a woman to do housework and cook for a man and that the performance of these tasks does not constitute abuse, even if the man coerces the woman to do these tasks. However, as Stark (2007) argues in his analysis of men's abuse of women in intimate relationships, men's coercive control of women tends to operate by specifically targeting facets of sexual inequality, like women's default consignment to housework. Kampusch did not say that Priklopil would 'suggest' meals for her to cook. She described a man so intent on controlling her every action and movement that he installed an intercom with loudspeakers in the cellar so that he could give her orders (or sometimes simply scream 'Obey! Obey! Obey!' at her) even when she was locked downstairs. Denying adult human beings the right to determine almost every aspect of their lives — how they cook, sleep, eat or talk and even which movies they watch — should be understood as abuse. Typically this kind of violence is clearly gendered and it is rarely exercised against men (Stark 2007) .

Some reports avoided discussing the relationship between Kampusch and Priklopil as though it were consensual, acknowledged the abuse in the relationship and compared it to a case of domestic violence. These reports, however, followed a disturbing pattern in mainstream media discourse of blaming the victim of domestic violence for not leaving. Kampusch's 'failure' to leave was positioned as the inexplicable result of individual pathology or proof that she wasn't 'really' held captive. The fact that Priklopil had once taken Kampusch skiing was the source of much speculation in the media, with reporters questioning how she could not have escaped. This question was so pervasive that it was as if Kampusch's perfectly reasonable response (that she left the first time Priklopil — a violent psychopath who kept her in a dungeon — wasn't watching her) seems inadequate for media commentators. Reporters observed that there was 'one absolutely fascinating fact that now provides a wealth of study material for psychologists the world over' (Clark 2007), which was that she had 'refused to escape' (Elkins 2006). Psychiatric diagnosis was again relied upon to explain Kampusch's behaviour: 'Psychologists believe Natascha was exhibiting clear signs of Stockholm Syndrome … which would explain why she did not take earlier opportunities to flee' (Campion 2007).

Theorists have observed a pattern in media stories about domestic violence: the focus is on the victim, with the victim 'held responsible for ending the abuse by leaving the relationship and blamed if they stay and let the abuse continue' (Berns 2004:3). This construction is problematic as it ignores that many women (let alone kidnapped 10-year-olds) face significant obstacles in exiting violent relationships. In Kampusch's case, it seems absurd that the emphasis is placed on the psychological state that prevented her from leaving: she was either locked in a cellar or continually watched by a violent and unstable man who threatened to kill anyone she asked for help. It is disturbing that the question 'why didn't she leave?' has become such a ubiquitous part of our discourse on domestic violence that it was asked even of a kidnapped 10-year-old who had been subject to eight years of physical violence and who did, in fact, leave. It suggests that Jones (1998) is right when she argues that: 'This question, which we can't seem to stop asking, is not a real question. It doesn't call for an answer; it makes a judgment.'

Narratives of resistance

Positive media narratives

This article largely focuses on the limitations of dominant media narratives and uses Kampusch's autobiography as an example of a subversive narrative. It must also be noted that there were counter-narratives *within* the mainstream media, prior to the publication of Kampusch's autobiography, which offered a different understanding of the Kampusch case. Five per cent of reports in the first and second time periods contained positive representations of Kampusch, and some of these reports criticised other reporters' approaches to the case. Mangan (2006) described Kampusch as 'intelligent' and 'dignified' and described the tabloids' treatment of the case as 'an edifying testament to the desire to will more suffering into existence'. McCartney (2006) described Kampusch as possessing 'reticence and dignity', and observed that she seems 'remarkably sane'. Her article suggests that the press were confused because: 'Miss Kampusch clearly had a prewritten role in this drama; she was, after all, a terrified Little Red Riding Hood fleeing the Wolf's lair, and yet here she was refusing to play it properly'. She also critiqued the public and press reaction to the case as 'clamourously intrusive and thirstily voyeuristic'. While these representations were in a small minority, they were published in mainstream media publications and demonstrate the potential for a more positive representation of victimhood.

3,096 Days

3,096 Days, Kampusch's autobiography, was published in September 2010.[7] Kampusch eschewed the narrative frames that attempted to position her as a certain 'type' of woman and insisted upon a retelling which emphasised her agency and her acts of resistance. Rather than framing the case as simply the extreme act of a deviant man, she insisted upon Priklopil's humanity — not to excuse him, but to draw attention to the society that created such a man, and in which less extreme forms of violence towards women and children are commonplace.

Kampusch rejected the label of 'Stockholm Syndrome' used to position her as a 'mad' woman. She stressed that it was inevitable that her relationship with Priklopil would be

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[7]   While the format of an autobiography is certainly different to that of newspaper reports, and does not face some of the same restrictions on time period and brevity, a comparison of these differing representations is important. Kampusch's narrative critiques the media representations of her, and offers an entirely different way of looking at the case — one taken up by several reporters in subsequent media reports.

more complex than that of an evil kidnapper and his cowering victim. Kampusch criticised the society that failed to comprehend this and the public reaction which, she argued, did not allow for the slightest nuance. She argued that the diagnosis of 'Stockholm Syndrome' was not only overly simplistic, but it also denied her the right to judge her own experiences:

> [S]ympathetic as the looks may be when the term is simply tossed out there, their effect is terrible. It turns victims into victims a second time, by taking from them the power to interpret their own story — and by turning the most significant experiences from their story into the product of a syndrome (Kampusch 2010:147).

Kampusch also challenged the narrative frame of the 'bad' woman and the accusations that she was money-hungry and manipulative. She argued that what people want to see is 'a broken person who would never get back up again, who would always be dependent on the help of others' (2010:236). She took issue with the claim made by some reporters that her 'media-savvy' attitude did not ring true for a genuine victim. She stated that she made a rational decision to attempt to control her image based on her observations of how the media had treated other crime victims. While captive, she had watched the coverage of the Marc Dutroux trial with great interest[8] and said she learnt two things from the trial: that victims of violent crime are not always believed and that people do not necessarily 'empathize with victims and give them limitless sympathy, but can very quickly switch to aggression and rejection' (Kampusch 2010:176). Given that she had eight years to ponder what she would do when she escaped, Kampusch argued that commentators should not necessarily have expected her to be naive and passive, and certainly should not have been surprised at or critical of the fact that she had considered how she would handle the media.

Kampusch also criticised reports that employed what this study called the narrative frame of the 'sex slave'. She articulated an understanding of why such extreme portrayals of her case were employed: they served to construct her case as being far removed from everyday examples of violence against women, allowing society to continue to ignore these more pedestrian brutalities and to avoid the need for self-examination. 'The perpetrator must be a beast, so that we can see ourselves on the side of good. His crime must be embellished with S&M fantasies and wild orgies, until it is so extreme that it no longer has anything to do with our own lives' (2010:163).

Neither did Kampusch believe her experience in any way resembled the romantic tale that some media reports employed to position her as a 'virgin bride'. Kampusch agreed with the media's interpretation of Priklopil's subjective state: 'Today I believe that Wolfgang Priklopil, in committing a terrible crime, wanted to create nothing more than his own little perfect world with a person that could be there just for him' (2010:120). However, Kampusch had a very different subjective experience of her captivity and emphasised the power imbalance as she experienced it, highlighting how far removed her experience was from that of a 'romance':

> I was in an inferior position when he humiliated me and mistreated me as he liked. I was in an inferior position when he locked me up, turned off my electricity and used me as forced labour ... I called him 'Criminal' when he wanted me to call him 'Lord'. Sometimes I said 'Honey' or 'Darling' instead of 'My Lord' in order to illustrate the grotesqueness of the situation that he had placed us both in (2010:154).

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[8] Dutroux kidnapped and abused six girls, four of whom he murdered. The survivors, Sabine Dardenne and Laeticia Delhez, testified at his trial. Dardenne also experienced distrust and doubt in the media as to the veracity of her version of events.

As well as resisting the various narrative frames employed by the media to position her as a less-than-ideal victim, Kampusch offered an alternative narrative that emphasised her agency. The dominant media narratives employed to position Kampusch often described her in such a way that her victimhood was represented as total, with no room for agency (or, alternatively, positioned her as if she wasn't a 'real' victim). While acknowledging Priklopil's brutality towards her, Kampusch also emphasised her own strength, and her efforts at resistance.

Kampusch's acts of resistance were detailed in *3,096 Days*, in which she described how she refused to call Priklopil the names he requested, was silent when he demanded speech, hit herself in the face before he could and punched him back when he struck her. This re-telling of her story not only stressed Kampusch's efforts to resist Priklopil, but also challenged and ultimately subverted the dominant media representation of her. Kampusch's narrative demonstrated that it is possible to represent women who suffer male violence as heroic, rather than as broken and disordered — something that is rarely done in the news media. Such representations are important because portrayals that focus on women's courage in the face of violence are disappointingly absent from popular representations (Stark 2007:17).

Kampusch, as well as emphasising her own agency, insisted on a contextualised understanding of the violence against her. The narratives employed by the mainstream media used individual explanations to 'make sense' of the case, ignoring the social and political context in which the kidnapping occurred. Kampusch pointed out that many women experience 'severe violence' or 'sexual harassment' at the hands of men and that such crimes 'take place behind any front door in the country, every day, and barely elicit much more than a shrug of the shoulders and superficial dismay' (Kampusch 2010:162). She highlighted Priklopil's misogyny — his 'hatred of women was deep-seated and irreconcilable and burst out of him again and again in little remarks' (2010:155) — and argued that the dominant construction of her case reflected an unwillingness to address the broader social issues at play in cases of gendered violence:

> Our society needs criminals like Wolfgang Priklopil in order to give a face to the evil that lives within and to split it off from society itself. It needs the images of cellar dungeons so as not to have to see the many homes in which violence rears its conformist, bourgeois head. Society uses the victims of sensational cases such as mine in order to divest itself of the responsibility for the many nameless victims of daily crimes, victims nobody helps — even when they ask for help (2010:162–3).

An examination of the newspaper articles published following the publication of *3,096 Days* suggested a positive response to the book in the media, with articles increasingly positioning Kampusch as both a legitimate victim and a complex person.[9] In the time period following its publication, there were very few articles that cast Kampusch in a negative light or relied on the narratives of the 'mad' or 'bad' woman or the 'sex slave' or 'virgin bride'. Most articles were neutral or very positive and, in contrast to earlier time periods, Kampusch was positioned as a particularly strong woman. For example, Mahoney (2010) described being 'left reeling at how mentally strong Kampusch must have been during her captivity and since'. Clark argued that what made the book so compelling was

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[9]   The third time period only contains 32 articles so it is difficult to come to definite conclusions. However, the excerpts from positive articles that follow demonstrate that those reporters who reacted well to the book reacted very positively to it. They did not just avoid employing critical narratives, they constructed Kampusch as a heroic character. While some articles in the earlier time periods reacted with sympathy, articles that portrayed Kampusch as heroic were scarce prior to the publication of the book.

'Kampusch's incredible mental fortitude and strength of character'. Goodwin (2010), in an article that stressed how critical the media had been of Kampusch, concluded that '*3,096 Days* is remarkable — not just for Kampusch's account of her ordeal in the cellar and afterwards in the glare of the media, but as a testament to her indomitable spirit'.

While the media articles published after the publication of Kampusch's book give some cause for optimism, it is important to note that many victims do not have the same determination and/or opportunity to make their voices heard. Further, it is likely that, in future cases, the media will employ the default position of seeking to explain the case and the victim's experience through standard narratives, despite the fact that such narratives do little to aid the community's understanding of why such events occur, or how their victims experience them. Nonetheless, the positive response by many reporters suggests that it is important to increase the opportunities for victims to express their own experiences — and not just through a limited discourse of trauma and suffering — as some media commentators are willing to engage with these counter-narratives, suggesting the possibility that, in time, subversive narratives by female victims could influence the discourse on gendered violence.

Conclusion

Analysis of articles about the Kampusch case demonstrated that reporters only selected from a few recurring narrative frames, with very few journalists opting for alternative interpretations. Journalists resorted to stock narratives, which tend to rely on preconceived notions of people and events — in this case on preconceived notions of women and the violence against them — to the exclusion of more nuanced or complex representations. The sex-specific nature of the narrative frames employed in the rush to 'explain' the Kampusch case suggests that, all too often, popular constructions of victimhood serve to delimit the subject positions available to female victims. These damaging myths and highly sexualised stereotypes about women delimit and constrict understandings of femininity, subjectivity and the possibilities for a woman's agency. The negative response to Kampusch's self-representation as an assertive and independent woman, and the highly gendered narratives employed to reposition her as an 'ideal' victim or sanction her for failing to embody this limited role, highlight the limitations of the 'victim' role as it is constructed in mainstream media. Regardless, the challenge offered by alternative media representations and in Kampusch's autobiographical narrative of resistance points to the possibility and potential for different, more empowering, representations of victims of gendered violence.

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