

To continue my research, I have looked at Hulu's *The Act, Casey Anthony: An American Murder Mystery* and an article from The New Yorker titled, *Remembering the Murder You Didn't Commit*.

The Act is a show which I'm not quite sure whether it fits into the category of true crime. According to our good friend Wikipedia, "True crime is a non-fiction literary and film genre in which the author examines an actual crime and details the actions of real people." This raises a question for me because *The Act* features a disclaimer with each episode that while it is based on a true story, some situations may be exaggerated. So, whether this can be considered a true crime tv show is really up in the air for me, but I thought it would be worth a watch because it centers around a true crime story which I have heard of in the past a few times and whenever it has come up I have found it to be very fascinating.

Alex: Were there any connections or information you were hoping the show might provide/answer that would help you, specifically with your disharmony/project before you began watching it?

Beth: Not really? I'm not sure, I think I've just been trying to watch a lot of this kind of stuff and think more about it while I'm watching it, trying to go past just watching it for the sake of entertainment to see if I pick up on themes or interesting aspects that might lead me somewhere. I honestly don't really know exactly where the research is taking me, I don't have a really set end goal for this research as it is now. I'm just kinda looking at things and seeing what I discover and where it takes me. For example, down below I realized a connection that lead me into reading about a case I had never heard of before but that was heavily centered on false confessions and a little bit about why they happen, and I think I will be following that trail of research going forward, at least for a little while, and see where I end up/what I discover.

DK: Beth, it is important that you examine your primary artifacts from other points of view besides what you ordinarily bring, starting with the values that are expressed in the artifact. I'll be looking for that as I proceed.

Beth: I know, this is something I struggle with sometimes...is it kind of what I did below with relating to fake news, and how an actual audience may see/relate to the show? I'm not entirely sure what else I should pull in here.

The show tells the story of Gypsy Rose Blanchard who is currently serving time in prison for her role in the murder of her mother. Gypsy and her mother, DeeDee, fooled people for a little over 20 years, from 1991-2015, into thinking that Gypsy was very seriously ill, wheelchair bound, needed a feeding tube, had cancer, the list goes on and on. DeeDee first started saying Gypsy has health problems when she was only a few months old and DeeDee insisted she had sleep apnea. The two of them reaped the benefits of people thinking Gypsy was ill, such as getting a house from Habitat from Humanity. The reality was that even if Gypsy had been fooled into believing these things about herself by her mother, she eventually put the pieces together and realized she was not ill, and that she had been lied to for years about her health. This caused her to find a man online, Nicholas Godejohn, who she formed a relationship with and together they plotted, and succeeded in murdering DeeDee in June of 2015. Now, people theorize that DeeDee

had a condition called Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy, now referred to as Factitious disorder imposed on another, which is a condition where a caregiver (parent, grandparent, etc) makes up or causes injuries or illnesses to the person they care for, usually with the behavior being encouraged by the attention and sympathy that the caregiver receives from doctors, family, friends, neighbors, etc.

Alex: Kopp regularly references the 1988 movie *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, which is based on a book, *Baron Munchausen's Narrative of his Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia*, about a fictitious German nobleman and his wild exploits, which inspired physicians to name the condition after the baron. It's not true crime, but the story of Baron Munchausen might be an interesting point to delve deeper into at some point.

Beth: super interesting, I didn't know the origin of the name of the condition, I'll have to look into that.

DK: Bless you Alex for bringing up the Baron's adventures. Beth, this is a powerful place to look, as it provides an interesting and productive view of "exaggeration." Also, how is the show, the values expressed, etc., somehow reflecting and even examining values and conflicts going on for a larger, American public. What is saying about its actual audience? One possible angle to look into is "fake news." You might also look into the criteria we customarily operate with when engaging in argument, especially forensic/judicial rhetoric. I recommend the documentary *Behind the Curve*, which I just blogged about the other day.

Beth: I just put *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* on hold at the library. I probably won't get it before Tuesday's class, but I definitely plan on watching it and using as a source. As for how the show reflecting and examining values and conflicts of the American public, I think that the show through Gypsy's want/need to be involved in 'normal' teenage things like cell phones, laptops, social media, boys, and so on, is a sort of commentary on what it is to be a 'normal' teenager in America, at least from the perspective of someone who is not a normal American teenager, which can show where some of our values as a society are. I think that a lot of people in this political climate may also feel trapped/at the mercy of the government in a way, and because of that a story of someone who is so trapped and controlled may be easy to identify with and be very satisfying to watch because while Gypsy does eventually end up trapped again (in jail) she does fight back and gain her freedom for a short while (even if her methods aren't the best). With the "fake news" environment we are living in, I think a lot of people hold some level of disbelief with anything they encounter that does not immediately line up with what they believe or with their values. It's "fake news" in a sense that Gypsy is sick, so people who come to the show with that mindset, may kind of see it in a manner which supports their skepticism of news that they don't like/don't want to be real? In a way I suppose that Gypsy being healthy was even "fake news" to DeeDee, because healthy is not what she wanted gypsy to be.

Without yet having watched *Behind the Curve* but having read your blog post about it, could this relate in that just like you saw flat-earthers one way before watching the doc (unenlightened, and kind of not worth consideration, othered) and after you were able to see them less as others and more as just humans who have a differing perspective, could this be like when at a trial and there are two very different versions of the events, the prosecution painting the picture in a way that

makes the defendant guilty, the defense painting a picture that at the very least paints the defendant as not guilty and at best innocent, and neither party is able to see the other's perspective because to the prosecution defense is this 'other' (like the flat earthers) and vice versa? Then in the case of *The Act*, there is Gypsy's version (she was abused for years), there's what we can assume would be DeeDee's version (she was protecting her daughter from all these illnesses), and neither of them would be able to see from the other's side, they never went through paradiastole, so they were kind of doomed for their situation to end poorly.

DK: Yes, that works.

The show follows everything DeeDee does to convince doctors that Gypsy is sick, including that they moved around a lot, that she would tell doctors that Gypsy's medical records were destroyed in Hurricane Katrina, the deception goes on. Right now, only four episodes have been released (one comes out tomorrow as I'm writing this), there should be eight episodes total. I think this is an interesting show to look at because of it being on the edge between true crime and not true crime as well as just the story of how someone can pull off such a large scale deception for so long without anyone finding out. I'm really curious as to how long the deception could have possibly lasted had DeeDee not been murdered.

Erin: Do you think that, even though some parts are manipulated for entertainment's sake, *The Act* still serves as a piece of crime history - maybe not True Crime - and is beneficial for your research? If so, what are the big takeaways you've gotten from watching those episodes thus far?

Beth: I think it definitely serves as a piece of crime history. The case has been talked about/researched before, and I have definitely seen articles here or there about it over the years, so I think that it being a little dramatized isn't the worst because there is other more factual, true-to-life accounts of the situation out there. I think the takeaways from this are more societal than anything. I think the popularity of this show, the fact that it is dramatized, and the amount of time/effort/budget that was spent on it (the show has some pretty well known actresses in it) show that people really have an interest in these types of stories and that they are profitable. I wonder what that says about both the people who want to watch these things (myself included) and the people who produce these types of shows. I've seen articles that say Gypsy Rose Blanchard is unhappy with *The Act* and I wonder about the ethics of making a show about someone's life, especially in this particular case, because even though she is a criminal, she was also a victim for the majority of her life. Basically, my takeaways are more questions, lol.

I also watched *Casey Anthony: An American Murder Mystery* on Hulu although it originally aired on Investigation Discovery this was a three episode mini-series about the murder of Caylee Anthony, the investigation into the case and the eventual trial of her mother, Casey Anthony. I watched this because I somewhat remember the case happening in the media. I was in eighth grade when Caylee went missing, which was in 2008. I remember seeing bits and pieces of news about the trial in the mornings before I would leave for school, but other than gathering "oh that mom killed her kid" and then finding out that Casey Anthony had been acquitted. I knew people had been outraged, but didn't know any details, so when I saw this mini-series pop up on Hulu, I figured I'd watch it and see what details I had missed out on all those years back. In a lot of ways, I feel like this case is like the Steven Avery case from *Making a Murderer*. There's lots of

evidence in both cases, for both sides, and the trials were both closely followed and analyzed. The difference is that while Avery was found guilty, Anthony was not. This caused a huge uproar at the time, I think because there was so much evidence that could incriminate her and because the idea of a mother killing her own child is so heinous and unthinkable to basically any normal person.

Erin: It may be helpful to dive into the psychological aspects of why it is that many cases in which a child is killed or disappeared revolves back to the parents. In this I mean to see the stats of true crime events in which the parent was guilty for the death or disappearance of their child. One possible other crime investigation could be the Madeleine McCann story circulating.

Beth: The idea of filicide (parent/s killing their own child/children) is a very interesting subject psychologically. I mean when you think about it, biologically, a parent's purpose is to do the exact opposite, to keep their child alive and healthy to keep the species going. So what has to go wrong for a parent to kill their own child and basically go against what their instincts in theory should be telling them to do? There's tons of stories of mothers killing their children, or fathers killing their whole families, I wonder if there's some common thread that runs through a majority of these situations.

I just found this article (it's from 2017, so not the most recent, but not terrible)

<https://www.cnn.com/2017/07/07/health/filicide-parents-killing-kids-stats-trnd/index.html>

The article has tons of stats about filicide, but here are the five major reasons they list:

- **Altruism:** The parent kills the child because he or she may **perceive it to be in the child's best interest**. It may be reality-based (e.g., the child suffers from a terminal illness) or precede the suicide of the parent, as the parent feels it would be unfair to leave the child behind to face the cruel world.
- **Acute psychosis:** The parent kills the child based on ideas that are **inconsistent with reality**. For example, the parent believes the child has been possessed by the devil.
- **Unwanted child:** The parent kills the child that he or she **regards as a hindrance**.
- **Accidental:** The child's death is an **unintentional outcome** of parental physical abuse.
- **Spousal revenge:** The parent kills the child in an effort to **exact revenge** on the other parent.

In the Casey Anthony case, the prosecution said her reason for allegedly killing her daughter Caylee, was the “unwanted child” reason listed above. They theorized that since Casey had Caylee when she was pretty young, she was annoyed by being essentially weighed down by a child and she wanted to be free to go out and do what she wanted when she wanted.

As for the Madeleine McCann case, I have started watching it, although I've only gotten through two episodes so far. This is a case that I remember hearing about in the past briefly, but I've never read/heard the whole story so I'm very interested in seeing how it turns out.

DK: *Medea* by Euripides is the original: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medea>

Beth: If I'm understanding the story of Medea correctly, she killed her children as revenge against her former husband Jason, right? That would make her the origin story of the “spousal revenge” reason listed above. (Sorry if I'm misunderstanding here, I have a hard time with

mythology stuff for some reason and this is my first stab at it, I'll probably need to read through it a couple more times).

Watching this show really cemented for me how wishy-washy (for lack of a better word) evidence can really be. We know from *Making a Murderer* that it is possible for evidence to be planted (or for it to be accused that evidence had been planted if you are on the other side) but in the Anthony case, it is never accused that the evidence was planted, instead there are questions about key witnesses, Casey's parents, covering up/retracting things that they had said in order to protect their daughter. For example, Casey's mother calls 911 to report that she has found Casey's car and exclaims that, "It smells like there's been a dead body in the damn car!" Later on, she says it wasn't a dead body smell, but instead the smell of garbage that was in a bag in the trunk of the car in the Florida heat. Even later, she says she lied to 911 to just try to get someone to come out, and that the car didn't smell like a dead body and she knew it. The constantly changing story really makes everything confusing, especially when the police think that the car trunk has evidence of decomposition in it. This is just one example of the constantly changing, newly revealed evidence that occurs during the case, showing how hard it really is for police and lawyers to actually get to the truth especially when there isn't much hard scientific evidence to lean back on. This leads me into some questions about the justice system in general and how we prosecute and assign guilt to people. That, I know is a whole big can of worms, and one that I will have to look into in the future if I want to really take a deep dive into it, but for now, a quick Google search led me to the following source.

Erin: I don't know if it will help, but I've been watching *Dexter* on Netflix. It's a show where a blood splatter analyst kills the bad guys that Miami Metro Police don't have enough evidence to catch or don't have the right to issue an arrest even though it is clear they are the perp. It helped me understand a bit more about the police force and the obstacles they come across in an investigation (lying witnesses/incorrect evidence/manipulation of the law, etc). I don't know if it'll help, but it does touch on this subject!

Beth: I'll look into it!

The third piece I looked at recently is an article from *The New Yorker* titled, "Remembering the Murder You Didn't Commit." This piece really connects well to "Making a Murderer" which is in my inventory of previous research, particularly in relation to Steven Avery's nephew Brendan Dassey.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/19/remembering-the-murder-you-didnt-commit>

Essentially, this piece covers a crime that happened in 1989 in Beatrice, Nebraska. The article explains that six people were accused of committing this rape/murder of an elderly woman, with most of the six either pleading guilty or no contest to the charges laid against them. After interviews with police, they after initially claiming no involvement would begin to remember the event through dreams or recovered memories, most of which had similarities to traumas they had endured in their own pasts. Years later, when prisoners were allowed to petition for DNA testing, it was discovered that the DNA at the scene did not match any of the accused, which resulted in them being released. So, why did they have these memories of being at the crime scene that clearly weren't true? Regarding one of the accused, the article explains,

“In Taylor’s telling, her confessions represented a kind of rebirth. She was confronting her past by proxy, recalling the details of another woman’s rape. “I took the barrier down,” she said. “I have been very truthful with everybody because I finally opened up.” Taylor described the sheriff and his deputies as “nurturing,” like friends. **She saw Price as her champion and emotional guide, and felt swept up by the collective endeavor to bring a rapist to justice.**”
*emphasis my own

Taylor saw Price (a local psychologist and a sheriff’s deputy) as her “champion and emotional guide”. Price was also Taylor’s therapist before this all began which is a huge conflict of interest in my opinion. And she was “swept up by the endeavor to bring a rapist to justice.” So she trusted the person who was telling her she had simply blocked her memories of the crime, and as she trusted Price and wanted to help do the right thing by putting away a rapist, she began to craft false memories based off of the questions that were asked of her and the details that those questions revealed. This is similar to how in *Making a Murderer*, Brenden, who has learning disabilities and was a minor at the time, is questioned by the police, alone, and is asked very leading questions that help him to piece together what the police want him to say, even if that isn’t the truth. This is helped along by police assuring him that once he just tells them the “truth” he can get back to his classes, and that nothing bad is going to happen (I’m super paraphrasing here as I haven’t seen *Making a Murderer* in a long time, but this is the gist). It’s the same pattern of earning the suspect’s trust and giving them just enough information that they can get the suspect to tell them what they want to hear, whether or not it is the truth.

The New Yorker article, goes on to explain that,

“When Taylor testified, White’s attorney, Toney Redman, asked her, “Can you actually separate today what you remember from the night this happened and what was suggested to you to help you remember what happened that night?”

“No,” she replied. “It would almost be impossible to separate.”

“Tell me what parts you actually remember that you didn’t have to have suggested to you,” he asked.

“Oh, God.”

“Is there anything?”

“Not that I can remember right offhand,” she said. “I know there is somewhere along the line, but I can’t remember.”

This shows how the real memories of Taylor’s own trauma from her childhood have become to entangled with the false memories of this rape/murder that she cannot even separate what is true from what is not.

“A [2015 study](#) in *Psychological Science* found that seventy percent of people, when subjected to highly suggestive and repetitive interviews, would come to believe that they had committed a

crime. They developed what the authors called “rich false memories,” detailed and multisensory, of having perpetrated a theft or an assault. The authors wrote that “imagined memory elements regarding what something *could* have been like can turn into elements of what it *would* have been like, which can become elements of what it *was* like.” In the past thirty years, roughly a hundred men and women in the United States have confessed to crimes for which they have later been exonerated by DNA evidence.”

Erin: So this makes me wonder if witnesses in other huge cases involving murder or rape were just prone to this rich false memory where they were interviewed and interrogated so much so that they began to believe the suspect was at the crime or did do what the police are accusing without having evidence other than the witnesses’ claim. I know there has to be tons of cases that an innocent is accused of because of false memories.

Beth: I think this is a good point, if the accused themselves can be convinced they did something they didn’t do, then I definitely think it's possible that the same could happen to witnesses.

This all connects to another show I have seen on Netflix, *The Confession Tapes*, described as, “When is a confession not a confession? When it's involuntary, coerced or downright false. Those are the claims made by the subjects featured in this true-crime series. Each episode goes inside a case in which a murder suspect made a confession but later backtracked. Episodes include interviews with investigators, lawyers, wrongful conviction experts and people close to those involved in the cases. Audio and video recordings of the suspects' interactions with members of law enforcement are also presented to help determine the legality of the confessions.”

I seem to have stumbled upon a larger issue through this line of research I have done, which is why are false confessions so easy to produce? Why do police sometimes seem more concerned with ‘solving’ a crime quickly than actually solving it and putting the real perpetrator behind bars? I don’t think it’s any secret that the American justice system.....leaves a lot to be desired. I suspect that if I followed the trails of any one of these cases of false confessions, I would find many aspects of the justice system that I disagree with/would be upset by.

I also wonder if like discussed in class on my last blog cycle, I think my interest in this subject stems from a, I think I referred to it as a “quest for justice” would I be as susceptible to giving a false confession as some of these people? As was mentioned in one of the quotes above, Taylor wanted to help put away a criminal even if that criminal was herself, would I be the same way, even if I knew I had not committed a crime, would someone be able to convince me I did?

Erin: Is this “quest for justice” similar to the hero complex in which people want to be a part of helping others and being the one to, for instance, catch a criminal?

Beth: Not for me, I don’t think. I think I’m on a “quest for justice” in the sense that I like to see things be concluded with justice, or see justice carried out, I don’t necessarily have a drive to be the one serving the justice or saving anyone, so maybe quest isn’t the word I should be using. Maybe desire would be better?

Going forward, I think I am going to look deeper into false confessions, and why they happen. I am also going to keep looking at recent true crime shows/documentaries/podcasts and see what other themes I can find that seem to be tying it all together.

DK: West Memphis Three: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Memphis_Three