

Cassidy Shaw: Straddling the Line Between Seasoned Crime Reporter and Stereotypical Female Journalist

While the authors of the Triple Threat Series create a character that seems like a tough and capable reporter, her strength is undermined by their depictions of her weakness in personal situations and relationships.

**By Alexis Alagem
USC Annenberg, 2011**

Introduction

The image of a journalist, both in media and reality, comes in so many forms, with so many different personalities, looks, and skill. In the early 1900s the image of the journalist was a man with suspenders holding up a pair of ill-fitting tweed pants, cigar hanging out of his mouth, hands flying over a typewriter in a newsroom devoid of women. In the 1950s, television journalists such as Walter Cronkite, promoted the image of trust and comfort in a voice that everyone knew so well and loved so dearly because he was the one that people turned to find out what was going on in the world. At the beginning of the 21st century, the image of the journalist includes everyone from charismatic, silver-haired Anderson Cooper from CNN to stylishly confident Carrie Bradshaw from *Sex and the City*, to the million of citizen journalists and bloggers that write about everything and anything that comes to mind wherever they might be.

The images of the journalists may be innumerable, but the image of the female journalist has not always, and may not still, come in so many diverse forms. Author Donna Bourne says that “Among all professions that of journalism offers perhaps the most impressive example of women’s intrepid persistence in the face of professional

hostility. Since mid-century, women have been employed on newspapers as gossip columnists, as editors of women's pages and sometimes as roving correspondents. But only rarely had a woman been hired as a regular reporter on general news stories. It took a succession of determined women to overcome this barrier."ⁱ But, the question remains: is the barrier really being traversed or do we just think women reporters are making progress because we tend to see a lot of them – usually young and attractive – on television?

Female journalists in fiction, film, and television are often portrayed one of two ways: as a tough and sometimes masculine-looking woman who is trying to prove that she can be part of the “boys club” in the newsroom or as a bubbly, attractive reporter who relies on her looks to get ahead. In fiction, readers often come across age-old stereotypes as they read about female news anchors and reporters “who are portrayed as attractive blondes with busty silhouettes and dim wits; they see female reporters who want to cover fashion and lifestyle, not politics or business; they see female journalists who nurture a passion for writing only to give it up for marriage soon after.”ⁱⁱ According to *Gender Communication* author Laurie P. Arliss, journalism and stereotypes are more closely linked than one might assume. “The term *stereotype* was coined in the 1920s by a journalist who was attempting to describe how members of a given society create shared ‘mental pictures.’ These pictures were believed to serve those who shared them in two ways: (1) by providing a shortcut for dissecting the continuous world into identifiable categories and (2) by providing a comfortable sense that the status quo was intact.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Karen Ross and Carolyn Byerly say: “The ways in which women are represented in

news media send important messages to the viewing, listening, and reading publics about women's place, women's role, and women's lives. The media...are arguably the primary definers and shapers of the news agenda and perform crucial cultural functions in their gendered framing of public issues and in the gendered discourses that they persistently promote."^{iv}

This essay will follow the life, both professional and personal, of crime reporter Cassidy Shaw, through the two first novels (the third is set to be released soon) that make up the *Triple Threat* series, by Liz Wiehl and April Henry. Throughout the novels, Cassidy has to deal with setbacks in her career, domestic abuse, battles with addiction and an unwavering sense of insecurity. However, while she is going through all of these hardships, the authors always reinforced that she is good looking, thin, and impeccably dressed. In each novel, she struggles to scramble her way to the top in the newsroom, and in the end gets shot down by her boss because there is someone younger and more beautiful nipping at her heels. Cassidy seems the epitome of everything female journalists in the real world are fighting against. Or is she? Throughout the series, the image of Cassidy Shaw presents a dichotomy between being a great journalist and just a pretty face.

The *Triple Threat* Novels

Former federal prosecutor Lis Wiehl collaborated with author April Henry on the three gripping mystery novels that make up the *Triple Threat* series. The novels follow three women who live in Portland, Oregon, all best friends, whose passion lies in crime: Cassidy Shaw reports it, Allison Pierce prosecutes it as a federal prosecutor, and special agent Nicole Hedges fights it. The three women went to high school together, but were

not friends until they reconnected at a reunion where they all realized their shared interests and complementary occupations. They bonded over a decadent chocolate dessert called the Triple Threat Chocolate Cake, and hence began calling themselves “The Triple Threat Club” on account of their fierce obsession with not only crime but also chocolate.

Each novel is about a serious case that the three women end up solving together, and there is always a shocking twist at the end. The series begins with *Face of Betrayal*, in which 17-year-old Senate page Katie Converse takes her dog out for a walk one morning and never returns. As the story unfolds, the reader slowly finds out that Converse had an affair with a married senator. Katie becomes impregnated by her sponsor, Senator Fairview and gets murdered. The whole story seems to lead to the senator as the obvious murderer, but at the end we find out that Converse was actually accidentally by her stepmother.

The second novel, *Hand of Fate*, begins when, Jim Fate, a controversial radio host in Portland, opens a package delivered to him. As he pulls the string to open the envelope, a poisonous gas is emitted that forces him to hold his breath. He motions for his colleagues to quickly evacuate the studio. In a few minutes, however, whether it was because he held his breath for so long or because the poison filled his lungs, Fate died. The three women work tirelessly to solve the case, each contributing important findings that finally, after several twists, turns and one suicide, determine that a young, impassioned intern is the murderer.

Who is Crime Reporter Cassidy Shaw?

“Act as if you were allowed to do something, or deserved something, or that it was only natural – and after a while people would begin to believe it.”^v

-Cassidy Shaw

Blonde, slender and ambitious are all words that describe Cassidy Shaw over and over in the *Triple Threat Club Series*. Shaw appears to be the quintessential female television reporter whose numerous beliefs include “The public has a right to know,”^{vi} and “It is all about the ratings.” Everything comes down to being professional, even appearance: “Everyone thought TV makeup and helmet hair were about chasing after beautiful perfection. Instead, it was all about eliminating distractions. Sweaty foreheads, five o’clock shadows, and hair hanging in your eyes made viewers stop paying attention to your storytelling. It wasn’t about looking pretty – it was about looking professional,”^{vii} according to Cassidy.

Looks should neither attract nor distract. Ideally, a reporter’s appearance should just be pleasant enough to be disregarded...I have decided to quit apologizing for my looks, which have played both a positive and negative role in my career. I have my own theory that attractive people in the industry are considered bad journalists; average looking reporters are automatically given more credence.

—Jessica Savitch (1982)^{viii}

Physical Traits

Cassidy fits in with most of the physical stereotypes that have developed about female television reporters and then she contradicts those stereotypes with her strength and ambition on the job. Blonde, and teal blue-eyed, as a result of colored contacts,^{ix} Cassidy was a cheerleader at Catlin Gabel, one of Portland’s elite private schools, where

she met, but was not very close with, Nicole and Allison.^x According to her friends, Cassidy was still a cheerleader with her intense, but short-lived, enthusiasm about everything.”^{xi} Cassidy almost always turns heads when she walks into a room, due in part to her customary bright colors that stand out among the jeans and dark parkas favored by most people in the restaurants and bars that she frequents.^{xii}

Moving up the totem pole by getting stories that no one else has is Shaw’s ultimate goal. She believes that one thing will greatly help maintain job security: looking as young and perfect as possible. She spends several hundred dollars getting her hair cut and colored every six weeks^{xiii}, and has always aspired to be bone thin. She constantly works hard to maintain a weight that her friends think is too low, but that she feels it is never low enough.^{xiv} Cassidy is a contradiction, however, because even though she complains about being fat and constantly exercises, she can’t kick her love of food and she has a habit of eating off other people’s plates. “In grade school kids used to make a big production out of licking their food in front of me so I wouldn’t eat it,”^{xv} she told her friends at one of their regular dinners. And Cassidy isn’t a light eater when it comes to mealtime either. Her foods of choice include steak, cooked rare^{xvi}, and pizza. “It always amazed Allison that her friend could eat the messiest foods while somehow managing not to drip on her clothes or smear her lipstick.”^{xvii}

Work History

Cassidy started her career in Medford, a small town just about the California border, beginning as little more than a glorified gofer. Her salary worked out to far less than minimum wage. She moved on to Eugene, a slightly larger town between Medford and Portland, where she was on the lowest rung of the ladder, getting the worst segments,

middle of the night stories, and silly lifestyle pieces. And then she moved to Portland, to Channel Four news, where we find her at the beginning of the first novel. According to Shaw, moving is just a part of the business: “If you wanted to get ahead in broadcast, you had to move again and again. With every move, you landed in a bigger media market and worked your way up once more. And if you were very, very lucky, as well as exceptionally good, you might make it to the networks.”^{xxviii}

She lives in the Riverside Condominiums, where Cassidy won a lottery to get into what was hoped to be an exclusive building, and a great real estate investment, until the real estate market bottomed out. “She hallowed out her retirement fund, already imagining the kind of return she would get. Only suckers would hold on to conservative stocks when there was so much money to be made in real estate.”^{xxix}

Cassidy hates politics and is convinced that every politician is a liar.^{xx}

Her signature accessory is her oversized bag in which she carries absolutely everything.^{xxi} “Cassidy’s purse held everything anyone might need: safety pins, sewing kit, makeup, food, buys tickets, greeting cards, and of course, food.”^{xxii}

Family Life and the Beginning of the Insecure Cassidy Shaw:

Cassidy’s parents raised her to believe that being beautiful was a woman’s greatest priority. While good grades meant little to them, if she dared to gain even five pounds she was sure to hear about it. This is where her obsession with perfection and being thin began, and why she went to spinning classes six days a week, got Botox and laser treatments at the dermatologist, and regularly frequented the nail salon, hair salon and spray-tan salon. “It maxed out her credit card, but it was better than the alternative.”^{xxiii}

While she appeared to be perfect growing up, it was in these formative years that her insecurity – something that plagues her throughout the series – began to take hold because her parents always found her lacking.^{xxiv} Her father caught her with “Tommy Malto in the backyard one summer night when they thought everyone was asleep. She was fourteen. Her parents had made it clear that she was used goods, of value to no one.”^{xxv} This was the night she lost her virginity.^{xxvi}

Not only did insecurity stem from her strained relationship with her father, but the need to be loved by a man, and do whatever it takes to make that happen, began to form as well. She was always sure of herself when it came to covering a story but in her personal life she needed constant reassurance. “Though she exercised obsessively, she complained about being fat, and worried aloud about growing old – and waited for someone to contradict her. And she twisted herself into a pretzel to gain the approval of whatever guy she was dating.”^{xxvii}

Insecurity? Definitely, but it is something that Shaw recognizes about herself without hesitancy: “Cassidy had a theory about people who spent their working lives entertaining the public. Secretly they were all just a tad insecure...and Cassidy counted herself among them.”^{xxviii} Whenever Cassidy was confused or had a bout of insecurity, she twisted strands of hair at the back of her head – a spot the camera never saw.^{xxix} But while she seemed professional and strong in front of the camera, when she watched herself on screen she was always extra critical. “Had she talked too fast, swallowed consonants, sped past important points? Had she been clear, credible, and comfortable? After all, this could be her big break. Did she really want to stay in Portland forever?”^{xxx} And for Shaw, her “big break” meant everything.

Shaw also felt very insecure around Nicole – “Sometimes when she was with Nicole, especially on the rare occasions when Allison wasn’t around, Cassidy was painfully aware that she was just too much – too talkative, too disorganized, too loud. Even her clothes seemed too bright.”^{»xxxix}

For Cassidy Shaw, It Is All About the “Big Break”

“There were times her job felt like that of a vulture, waiting for something to die so she could swoop in and pick over its bones. And maybe if it wasn’t quite dead yet, she could help it along.”^{»xxxix}

-Cassidy Shaw

Like many young reporters, Cassidy Shaw is hungry and wants the recognition and stature that comes with being an award-winning reporter, and possibly an anchor. Almost everything she does and everything she works for is to snag the co-anchor seat next to Channel Four’s current anchor, Brad Buffet.

Her first “big break” was illustrated when she was at the forefront in the reporting of the Katie Converse mystery in *Face of Betrayal*. Because of her ambition, drive, and the fact that she never took no for an answer, Shaw was able to snag an interview that would change the course of her career. “Senator Fairview and his wife had agreed to be interviewed by her. By Cassidy Shaw. Live. On primetime TV. The Interview would be carried nationally. This was it at last – her big break.”^{»xxxix} According to Shaw, “The Katie Converse story could make or break her career. And right now it was making it.”^{»xxxix}

“Big Footed”

“It was a measure of the cruel reality of the news business that at thirty-three she might legitimately be considered old and bitter.”^{xxxv}

-Cassidy Shaw

While Shaw may be extremely confident in her abilities as a crime reporter, the threat of being “big-footed” always looms. In this case, as the story about the missing young Senate page gets bigger and bigger, Madeline McCormick, who anchors the nightly news for the network that owns Channel Four, wanted the story for herself. “A junior reporter would get a lead, do all the work, and then before it could go to air, the more senior reporter would take the story and claim it as his.” But, Cassidy was too ambitious and strong at work to let this happen to her. “Tell you what. Madeline can do the intro and bring viewers up to date. But this is my interview. And mine alone.”^{xxxvi} Another threat to Shaw is the new 22-year-old^{xxxvii} intern at Channel Four, Jenna Banks, whom we first meet in the *Hand of Fate*.^{xxxviii} Everything about Jenna annoys Cassidy, from her age, a good ten years younger than Cassidy, to her shiny white teeth to the bright blue exercise ball she sits on instead of a chair because she claims it helps strengthen her core. “Cassidy was already tired of the ball, and how Jenna bounced on it, and how her blonde cascade of hair rippled when she did, and how her tiny skirts rode up her slender thighs.”^{xxxix} But, most of all, she was annoyed that Jenna was getting stories – even if they were stories that Cassidy didn’t particularly want – without putting in the grunt work that Cassidy did work. When the station brings up the idea of doing a story about prostitution, Cassidy thinks she would be the reporter on the case: “Even if she will look pretty darn sexy, it was still demeaning. Well, she wasn’t that desperate. She would

just tell them no. And then they would beg and plead, and maybe she would work some kind of deal.”^{xi} But, she was never offered the story. It went to Jenna.

The portrayal of Shaw’s insecurity about her age and looks reinforces the image of the female journalist as weak and not equal to her male counterpart. There are no instances in either of the novels of the male anchor, Brad Buffet, becoming nervous about being “big-footed” by Shaw.

According to Bettina Peters at the UNESCO Conference on Women in the Media: “After more than a decade of research indicating that women are dissatisfied with their media portrayal the industry has done little to change its practices. Women are grossly under-represented and where they do feature, they are still portrayed in a narrow range of stereotyped roles.”^{xii}

From Insecure as a Woman to Secure as a Journalist

The insecurity that haunted her personal life and her physical appearance has no place in Shaw’s life as a reporter. Here, she is confident and flourishes when on the air. “There was nothing like being on air live. Nothing. Factually, you could never be wrong. You also had to go quickly with what you knew. You needed to be able to speak coherently and to organize and write the story even as you were still telling it.”^{xiii}

Additionally, Cassidy can think on her feet, putting disparate facts together to tell a cohesive story,^{xiiii} something that not all journalists are able to do, and for a women, it takes even more to be proven as a professional and get the support of the viewers. “TV viewers sometimes complained that women couldn’t do serious news, not with their tendency to half smile even when announcing horrendous death tolls. Not with their singsong, high-pitched voices. [Shaw] was careful to keep any hint of a smile from her

lips as she spoke in a low-pitched, even voice,^{”xliv} as she reported about the Katie Converse story.

Her drive to succeed is also evident in her rule to never back down from a story and to always dive into it head first. In the second novel, *Hand of Fate*, as people flee downtown to escape whatever gas killed Jim Fate, Cassidy trades her four-inch stilettos for Nikes and runs straight into the thick of the chaos, cameraman at the ready so she could get footage that everyone else was too fearful to go for. “Of course Cassidy wouldn’t leave. You didn’t get an award-winning story by running away with the stampeding herd. You got it by going where no one else wanted to go. And that meant she had to make her way *to* downtown.”^{”xlv} She believes that reporters have a chance to make a story as big as possible, and sometimes even are able to create stories. “She got off the soapbox and elbowed her way toward the front,” outside Senator Fairview’s office in *Face of Betrayal*. “Other reporters gave Cassidy dirty looks as she stepped on toes and squeezed through non-existent spaces, but she had covered this story from the beginning. She was the one who had *made* it a story.”^{”xlvi}

Her need to get into the thick of things becomes evident again in *Hand of Fate* when she decides she would do whatever it takes to be the first at the scene of a story. “Cassidy was not the kind of woman who belonged on an ATV,” but she would do anything to get right into the core of a breaking story.^{xlvii} “Overhead she heard the sound of a helicopter. Whatever channel it was, they were going to be kicking themselves when they saw that Cassidy had gotten the story first – again.”

Nicole Hedges and Allison Pierce

“Some women try to ‘beat the boys at their own game’ by adopting assertive and macho styles...[W]omen have attempted to challenge masculine newsroom cultures that masquerade as neutral professionalism...”^{xxlviii}

-Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming

FBI Special Agent Nicole Hedges is not only one of Shaw’s best friends, but divides the role of main character in the novels with the other two women. Hedges is African American and was brought up in a religious home. While Nicole is portrayed as an extremely strong and capable woman so that she projects more of a male image. Some other characters in the novels see her as a lesbian just because she enjoys working out in the gym, pours her heart and soul into being an agent, and does not date men. She does not date, however, because she has a 10-year-old daughter, Makayla, who was conceived after Hedges was raped by two men who gave her a date-rape drug at a bar. Throughout the novels Hedges goes through many trials and tribulations, but always comes out on top, and never appears to be as weak as Shaw is sometimes portrayed.

Allison Pierce is a federal prosecutor who makes up the last third of the *Triple Threat Club*. She is married to a man named Marshall, and throughout the novels we follow her and her husband as they try to, unsuccessfully, have a baby. Pierce and Hedges work closely together to solve many of the cases, with Shaw seemingly just hanging around in the background, trying to get some sort of new information from them.

Cassidy Shaw’s Inside Sources

Shaw may claim that she “made a story” or that her hard-headedness is the reason she was able to obtain exclusive interviews or report information that was previously

never heard. Two other factors allow her to be a step above her competitors: Nicole Hedges and Allison Pierce. As a federal prosecutor and an FBI agent, Cassidy's friends, are at the forefront of any new information and breaks in whatever case they are working on. While details of an investigation would normally be kept secret from reporters until they are released to the public, Shaw always seems to luck out and persuade her friends to share the scoop.

Even though her biggest sources are her two best friends, she is not above negotiating with them to make sure she gets a good story that no one else has. "Forty-eight. I need it to be forty-eight," Cassidy said of Nicole's willingness to give her a 24-hour lead without telling other reporters about the new information in the case of Katie Converse. "With forty-eight I can tell the management and Maddy to take a flying leap."^{xlix}

Cassidy Shaw and Her Many Men

Never at a loss for male companionship, "Cassidy changed men about as often as she changed shoes."^l Whether working out in the gym, at work or at a coffee shop, she seems to have no trouble finding a new man, and according to Cassidy, she is "a sucker for anything in trousers."^{li} The two major relationships we see are with sexy turned abusive cop Rick in *Face of Betrayal*, and her short-lived dalliance with Jim Fate in *Hand of Fate*.

Shaw's Relationship with Rick

The first man in Cassidy's life whom we meet is a cop named Rick. Shaw met Rick when she interviewed him after a 7-Eleven clerk got shot and Rick asked her out for coffee afterward. "He is very fine. He reminds me of a fox, or maybe a wolf. He's got

these pale blue eyes and dark brown hair and a very muscular body.”^{lii} The relationship starts off very crazy and passionate, “just the way Cassidy liked it.”^{liii} But the relationship soon began to change for the worse: at first he is rough with her but she thinks it is just playful jealousy, but then she begins to get scared of his intensity^{liv}. “Something pulsed low in Cassidy’s belly. Was it desire – or fear?” And then he began to get abusive. There was once instance where he saw her talking to a male colleague and he grasped her arm and said, “I saw you. I saw you flirting with that guy.” Even though Cassidy is shocked at his reaction, she feels guilty. He begins the physical abuse with quick but severe pinches in places he knows no one would see, such as her waist. “You are acting like a slut,” he tells her. The word knocked the air out of Cassidy, because it was the same word her father called her on that fateful night when she was fourteen. The day after, Rick brought Cassidy red roses and apologized saying he was just jealous. She forgave him. After Rick started abusing her, she seemed different to her friends, in both what she wore and how she acted. She seemed “flat.”^{lv}

The abuse, both physical and emotional, continues until one night when Nicole and Allison comes over to find cut up lingerie in Cassidy’s trash. They questioned her, and Cassidy looked away, saying, “Oh, Rick says I dress too slutty. If I want to be taken seriously as a professional, he says I need to look more buttoned up. He says I’m insecure, and that’s why I’m always flaunting myself.”^{lvi} The relationship with Rick is just another instance where Cassidy’s insecurity is being made worse. So reminiscent of her relationship with her father, she blames herself for the things that Rick is projecting on her in an attempt to do whatever it takes to be loved and to please the man in her life.

She even defended Rick by telling her friends, “I’m a professional broadcast reporter, not some little tart on an entertainment news program. I’m a serious journalist.”^{lvii} Later, her friends forced her to seek treatment for the abuse when it was obvious that it was becoming a threat to her life.

According to an essay by Annenberg alum Amanda Rossie, “The image of a strong woman made weak at the hands of men moves beyond fantasy to become an expectation for readers. Through a textual commoditization of the characters’ breasts, legs, face, and other body parts, these women are actually being reduced to less than the sum of [their] body parts.”^{lviii}

Instances of Abuse for Real Female Reporters

The image of women being portrayed as weak victims does not only lie in the world of fiction. There are many instances of female reporters being physically, emotionally or sexually assaulted that further the image of the female journalist as a sex object. However, what is very interesting is how this sexualization of female journalists is so prevalent in reality right now. Every day there seems to be a new story in the media about female journalists and how they are viewed as sex objects and how there are so many instances of sexual assault. One example of this in reality is Erin Andrews. Andrews, a sports reporter for ESPN, was the victim of sexual assault when she was filmed, unknowingly, getting undressed in a hotel room.^{lix} Another, more recent, example, is CBS Chief Foreign Correspondent Lara Logan. Logan was stripped of her clothes, punched and slapped by a crowd in Egypt's Tahrir Square the night President Hosni Mubarak stepped down from power. Apparently the crowd thought her to be an Israeli, Jewish spy.

Is the sexualization and treatment of women in reality related to how female reporters are portrayed in the media or the other way around? The image of the blonde, slender, spunky reporter who doesn't take no for an answer, a la Cassidy,^{lx} does not seem to help the case of the image of the journalist as a sex object, regardless of whether she is a great reporter. Even though a lot of importance is put on her competency at her job and how willing to do anything to get a story, every time Shaw is discussed in the series there is some mention of her looks or what she is wearing. "You couldn't spend sixteen hours in four inch heels and not pay the price. But they did make her legs look good – long and muscular."^{lxi}

Cassidy's Relationship with Jim Fate

Even though her relationship with Jim Fate was almost non-existent and did not have the type of drama she experienced with Rick, it is the central relationship in the second novel, *Hand of Fate*.

While Jim Fate was loudly opinionated and stubborn on his radio show, *The Hand of Fate*, Cassidy had sometimes seen a different side of him: more mannerly, more seductive. Cassidy and Jim "had been lovers for a short time the year before, long enough for Cassidy to realize that they had the wrong things in common. Both of them, at heart, were hustlers. Both of them were looking out for the number one,"^{lxii} but Cassidy quickly realized that he wasn't the right guy for her. The last time she saw him before he died, he had asked her to dinner at the RingSide steakhouse. He invited her to dinner for numerous reasons: first, he wanted to be more than just friends. Second, he wanted to persuade Cassidy to come to work with him and replace his current co-host,

Victoria Hanawa. “You may be a serious journalist,” he told her, “but you’re also a woman who has opinions and who never gets a chance to air them.”^{lxiii}

Cassidy Shaw as the Victim

According to social critics Byerly and Carol who wrote *Women & Media: A Critical Introduction*, “Women thus appear to be at their most interesting when they are in most pain, when they experience most suffering.”^{lxiv} Cassidy Shaw is no different. In both *Face of Betrayal* and *Hand of Fate*, Cassidy finds herself in dangerous situations, first in an abusive relationship, both physically and emotionally, with her boyfriend Rick, and then she is held at gunpoint by the women who we find out are the murderers in each novel. In each case, Cassidy comes across as weak and stripped of the power that she usually holds when she is in front of the camera. The scenes of Cassidy as a victim take away from the strong female reporter that the authors try to create with her ambition, drive and skill as a journalist, and turn her into just a pretty blonde girl with a string of bad luck. According to Rossie, “The victim stereotype steals power away from the female reporters and places them at the whim of their male aggressors.”^{lxv}

At the height of Cassidy’s abusive relationship with Rick, the strong journalist disappears and she seems to become defeated. “The glass slipped from Cassidy’s hand and shattered into a dozen pieces. She started to cry. ‘I can’t sleep. I can’t eat. I can’t think,’” she says blaming her depression on stress with work. “Cassidy wasn’t a pretty crier. Her eyes immediately turned puffy and snot leaked from her nose.”^{lxvi} The image of beauty is always linked to Cassidy no matter what the situation.

Cassidy turns into a victim is at the end of *Face of Betrayal* when Katie Converse’s stepmother turns out to be her killer. “They heard the sound of the front door

opening. Nicole got to her feet, with Allison following a beat later. But it wasn't just Valerie who walked around the corner. She had one arm around Cassidy's stiff shoulders. And Valerie's other hand pressed a gun against Cassidy's ribs."^{lxvii} At the end of this scene, Valerie Converse ends up shooting Nicole, but Nicole still comes off as the strong FBI agent, while Cassidy, who was not actually harmed, comes off as a weak, scared girl.

The images of Cassidy as an addict also add to her image as a victim.

Addictions: How Sleeping Pills and Alcohol Almost Derail Her Career

"Working in TV was like a drug. You got addicted to the action and the recognition. But the business was so small that once you lost or left an important job, it was difficult – if not impossible – to go back."^{lxviii}

Addiction is a very big part of Cassidy's life. Throughout the novels we learn that Cassidy becomes addicted to three things: work, alcohol and sleeping pills. Cassidy's increasing love of substances make her unable to feel. While the women always share wine, beer, or cocktails together on their nights out, Cassidy's intake of alcohol seems to spiral out of control throughout the two novels. Her friends learn she has a problem one night when they came to her apartment to check on her. "Cassidy always had something to drink when the three of them were together, but even for Cassidy, a water glass full of wine seemed a bit much."^{lxix} However, her alcohol abuse soon combines with an addiction to something else: sleeping pills. Cassidy becomes addicted to sleeping pills after Jim Fate gives her one of his Somulex tablets when she complains that she has a hard time sleeping. "Cassidy had never been a good sleeper, but the events of the past few months had ramped up her problem to the point where she sometimes went an entire

night without sleep.” It started with Rick, and then escalated when she saw Nicole get shot by Valerie Converse.^{lxx} Her addiction to the sleeping pills hits a crescendo when she falls asleep in her bathtub after washing sleeping pills down with a glass of wine.^{lxxi} She wakes up in a bath of cold water, thankful that her head hadn’t slipped under the water.

Cassidy Joining the “Sob Sisters” Club

Journalism historian, Howard Good, sums up how female journalists felt about being called *Sob Sisters*: “Most women reporters resented this label because it reinforced the stereotype of women as big-hearted but soft-minded, emotionally generous but intellectually sloppy.”

The term *sob sister* dates to about 1925 (according to numerous slang dictionaries), and is defined as: “a woman news reporter who appeals to readers’ sympathies with her accounts of pathetic happenings.”^{lxxii} According to author Joe Saltzman, one of the *sob sister*’s main goals is to prove herself to her male counterparts. In doing so she is shown as an “independent, hardworking reporter who never lets her newspaper down.”^{lxxiii} Cassidy fits this description perfectly, because throughout the series we see her struggling to do anything she can to be the star reporter that she knows she is. Her main goal is to become Brad Buffet’s co-anchor and show that a female is more than capable and should be sitting at the anchor desk.

Another example of Shaw’s portrayal as a *sob sister* is her emotional frailty. “Occasionally, the *sob sister* shows signs of feminine frailty. Most female reporters eventually need rescuing by the most available male. But more often than not, she outwits, outfoxes, and out-reports every male reporter in sight. Only then does she become one of the guys.”^{lxxiv}

Other Female Reporters in Fiction

“Examples of women in television news appearing in novels include Robin Hudson, a television news porter in a series of mysteries written by Sparkle Hayter, including *What’s a Girl Gotta Do?* (1994), *Nice Girls Finish Last* (1996), *Revenge of the Cootie Girls* (1997), *The Last Manly Man* (1998), *The Chelsea Girl Murders* (2000). Joan Carpenter is co-anchor of St. Louis’ evening news show, “Nightbeat” and deals with arrogant news directors, cutthroat TV critics and jealous co-anchors, but isn’t ready for the twisted psychopath who comes after her (*Fan Mail*, 1993). A young woman TV reporter and an anchorman investigate two deaths (*Molly McKitterick’s Murder in a Mayonnaise Jar*, 1993); Katlyn Rome receives the anchor slot on L.A.’s “Six O’Clock News” (Hal Friedman’s *A Hunting We Will Go*, 1997); Laura Barrett, who seemingly had it all – success as a co-anchor of the national evening news, a charming husband, a beautiful daughter – but she also has a secret past (Emily Listfield’s *The Last Good Night*, 1997); Cynthia Diamond, a TV news anchorwoman (Jean Heller’s *Handyman*, 1995); Delia Jamison, a gorgeous woman at the pinnacle of her career, anchor of a network news show in Los Angeles, is being blackmailed (Winston Groom’s *Such a Pretty, Pretty Girl*, 1999); TV anchor Lacie Wagner is also an investigative TV journalist (Jeannine Kadow’s *Burnout*, 1999; *Dead Tide*, 2002); Reporter/anchor Holly Johnston, “a drop-dead-gorgeous new kid on the block striving to prove she’s up to the task and more than just eye candy” (Yolanda Joe’s *This Just In...*, 2000); Madeleine Hunter (“Maddy”) is an award-winning TV anchorwoman (Danielle Steel’s *Journey*, 2000); Dana Evans is a beautiful young anchorwoman for a Washington, D.C., television network searching for a killer (Sidney Sheldon’s *The Sky Is Falling*, 2000); Serpentine

Williamson needs to lose weight to get the coveted anchor spot in Chicago (Venise T. Berry's *All of Me: A Voluptuous Tale*, 2001); news anchorwoman Eliza Blake is the famous face in front of the camera (Mary Jane Clark's *Close to You*, 2001).^{xxv}

Conclusion

The character of Cassidy Shaw in the *Triple Threat* series is a confusing one. At points she makes female journalists look like strong, capable equal counterparts to male journalists, and then in the next instance she is made to look weak, or hyper-sexualized. She is the definition of the dichotomy between a pretty face and a smart brain, but why does her intelligence and reporting skill always have to be supplemented with comments about her clothing and/or looks? Understandably, fiction is a form of entertainment, and the research I discussed above shows that people are attracted to characters that have to go through hardships, but Cassidy seems to go through more of them than the other female characters in the series. The character of the journalist or reporter is subject to many more stereotypes than other professions, and this is due to a long history of the female journalist as an attractive, if maybe not the smartest, woman.

What Wiehl and Henry did do, however, was create a series where the spotlight is focused on women and women only. The men in the novels take a backseat, with under-developed character analysis and story lines, which allows the reader to focus only on the relationship the women have with each other, their careers and their families. When the men are mentioned, they are almost always viewed in a negative light (Rick the abuser, Brad Buffet the snobby anchor, etc.). Even though the authors may have not been successful in changing the stereotype of the female reporter as a sex object, they were successful in creating a story about women who are able to fight through anything, and

make it out on top.

Endnotes

ⁱ Born, Donna. "The Image of the Woman Journalist in American Popular Fiction, 1890 to the Present," A Paper presented to the Committee on the Status of Women of the Association of Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Michigan State University, East Lansing, August, 1981, p. 6. Born references Lois W. Banner's *Women in Modern America – A Brief History* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974, p. 20). p. 36.

ⁱⁱ Rossie, Amanda. *Beauty, Brains and Bylines: Comparing the Female Journalist in the Fiction of Sheryl Woods and Sarah Shankman*. A paper presented to the faculty of the University of Southern California. Los Angeles, CA. 2009. p. 1

ⁱⁱⁱ Rossie, p. 2

^{iv} Byerly, Carolyn M., and Karen Ross. *Women & Media: A Critical Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. p. 40

^v Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 200

^{vi} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 23

^{vii} *ibid* p. 166

^{viii} Chambers, Deborah, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming. *Women and Journalism*. London: Routledge, 2004. p. 58

^{ix} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 131

^x *ibid* p. 128

-
- ^{xi} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 25
- ^{xii} *ibid* p. 85
- ^{xiii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 23
- ^{xiv} *ibid* p. 236
- ^{xv} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 87
- ^{xvi} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 134
- ^{xvii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 175
- ^{xviii} *ibid* p. 267
- ^{xix} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 64
- ^{xx} *ibid* p. 231
- ^{xxi} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 86
- ^{xxii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 127
- ^{xxiii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 16

^{xxiv} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 65

^{xxv} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 16

^{xxvi} *ibid* p. 111

^{xxvii} *ibid*. p. 90

^{xxviii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 86

^{xxix} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 21

^{xxx} *ibid*. p. 55

^{xxxi} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 200

^{xxxii} *ibid*. p. 143

^{xxxiii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville,

TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 149

^{xxxiv} *ibid*. p. 56

^{xxxv} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 19

^{xxxvi} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville,

TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 150

^{xxxvii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 21

-
- ^{xxxviii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 149
- ^{xxxix} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 19
- ^{xl} *ibid.* p. 21
- ^{xli} Value and limits of a self-regulatory approach to gender equality in the media, IFJ discussion paper prepared by Bettina Peters for the UNESCO Conference on Women in the Media: Access to Expression and Decision-Making, Toronto 1995.
- ^{xlii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 166
- ^{xliii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 182
- ^{xliv} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 151
- ^{xlv} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 30
- ^{xlvi} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 167
- ^{xlvii} *ibid.* p. 235
- ^{xlviii} Chambers, Deborah, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming. *Women and Journalism*. London: Routledge, 2004. p. 104
- ^{xliv} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 245

^l *ibid.* p. 177

^{li} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 185

^{lii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 89.

^{liii} *ibid.* p. 124

^{liv} *ibid.* p. 125

^{lv} *ibid.* p. 262

^{lvi} *ibid.* p. 247

^{lvii} *ibid.* p. 247

^{lviii} Rossie, p. 27

^{lix} http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/07/22/erin-andrews-in-naked-pee_n_242732.html

^{lx} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 266.

^{lxi} *ibid.* p. 266

^{lxii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 180

^{lxiii} *ibid.* p. 179

^{lxiv} Byerly, Carolyn M., and Karen Ross. *Women & Media: A Critical Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. p 43

^{lxv} Rossie, p. 23

^{lxvi} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 246

^{lxvii} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 278

^{lxviii} *ibid.* p. 183

^{lxix} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2008. p. 245

^{lxx} Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN:

Thomas Nelson, 2010. p. 65

^{lxxi} *ibid.* p. 85

^{lxxii} Saltzman, Joe. *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture*.

2003. <http://ijpc.org/sobsmaster.htm>. p. 2

^{lxxiii} Saltzman, 2003. p. 3

^{lxxiv} Saltzman, 2003. p. 3

^{lxxv} Saltzman, 2003. p. 12

Bibliography

Bettina Peters for the UNESCO Conference on Women in the Media: Access to Expression and Decision-Making. *Value and limits of a self-regulatory approach to gender equality in the media, IFJ discussion paper*. Toronto 1995.

Born, Donna, "The Image of the Woman Journalist in American Popular Fiction, 1890 to the Present," A Paper presented to the Committee on the Status of Women of the Association of Education in Journalism Annual Convention, Michigan State University, East Lansing, August, 1981

Byerly, Carolyn M., and Karen Ross. *Women & Media: A Critical Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Chambers, Deborah, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming. *Women and Journalism*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Rossie, Amanda. *Beauty, Brains and Bylines: Comparing the Female Journalist in the Fiction of Sheryl Woods and Sarah Shankman*. A paper presented to the faculty of the University of Southern California. Los Angeles, CA. 2009.

Saltzman, Joe. *Sob Sisters: The Image of the Female Journalist in Popular Culture*, 2003, <http://ijpc.org/sobsmaster.htm>.

Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Face of Betrayal: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008.

Wiehl, Lis, and April Henry. *Hand of Fate: A Triple Threat Novel*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010.