

RESEARCH BRIEF

Of Culpability and Blamelessness: The Narratives of Women Formerly on Death Row in the Philippines

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Across different cultures, the specific experiences and circumstances of women who transgress the law and are punished for it have historically received little attention in academic discourse and public debate. Women in prison are the “forgotten offenders” and comprise an invisible minority (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004b; Cook & Davies, 1999; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Nagel & Johnson, 2004; Richie, 1996; Schram & Koons-Witt, 2004; Thomas, 2003; Watterson, 1996). Criminology traditionally focused on men offenders and their experiences. Studies on the role of gender in the creation and response to crime are a more recent development in the field. Gender is defined as the social and cultural construction of behaviors, roles, and identities associated with femininity and masculinity (Lorber, 2005). Meanwhile, crime is a legal category, as opposed to a moral one, that pertains to “a kind of behavior which is poorly regarded in the community compared to most other acts, and behavior where this poor regard is institutionalized” (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 2).

Women prisoners’ smaller numbers and lesser involvement in violent offenses, compared to their

male counterparts, have been used to justify the inattention and neglect they encounter within the criminal justice systems of different countries (Alarid & Cromwell, 2006; Cook & Davies, 1999; Davis, 2003; Faith, 1993, cited in Law, 2003). Early research failed to situate women’s involvement in illegal activity in the context of moral, political, economic, and gendered spheres (Smart, 1977).

While research on women and girls in the criminal justice system has been more visible over the last 30 years, the experiences and concerns of incarcerated women continue to receive minimal attention in mainstream criminology and criminal justice literature. By and large, conventional criminology has focused on so-called “aberrant individuals,” as opposed to broader, inequitable social relations, including gender hierarchies. The discipline has reinforced gender stereotypes in the study of specific crimes, such as infanticide, at the risk of obscuring the social contexts in which they occur (Crimmins, Langley, Brownstein, & Spunt, 1997; Resnick, 1969, 1970, cited in Meyer & Oberman, 2001). Mainstream criminology has thus failed to acknowledge the

gendered nature of women's and men's circumstances, experiences, and social positioning, and how these inform patterns of offending, criminalization, and punishment and the nuances therein (Cook & Davies, 1999; Howe, 1994; Schram & Koons-Witt, 2004). Indeed, feminist scholars have asserted the need to consider gender dynamics to fully understand crime and criminal justice processes (Bloom, 2003; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Chesney-Lind, 2001a; Chesney-Lind, 2001b; Chesney-Lind, 2002; Covington, 2004). Feminist contributions to the research on punishment, sentencing, and correctional institutions have emphasized that women's pathways to crime and imprisonment deserve serious study in its own right (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004a; Cook & Davies, 1999; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Davis, 2003; George, 2010; Girshick, 1999; Goodstein, 2006; Howe, 1994; Miller, 2001; Muraskin, 2007; Owen, 2005; Rafter, 1992; Renzetti & Goodstein, 2001; Renzetti, Goodstein, & Miller, 2006; Steffensmeier & Broidy, 2001; Watterson, 1996; Zaitzow & Thomas, 2003).

Because their experiences, concerns, and treatment are deemed secondary to those of their male counterparts, women prisoners are rendered invisible in their respective societies—a trend that mirrors the broader devaluation of women under patriarchy, among other forms of inequality (Covington, 2002; Covington & Bloom, 2003; Ransley, 1999). This is an unfortunate trend, as women have different pathways to crime due to the gendered expectations, roles, and social positions imposed on them under an unequal, male-defined state (Daly, 1992; Gilfus, 1992; Howe, 1994; Richie, 1996). Research on women and crime points to limited information on the experiences of women prisoners from non-Western, developing nations, such as political prisoners, refugees, and non-citizen detainees (Amnesty International, 2003a; Aziz, 2003; Kilroy, 2003; Ransley, 1999). The invisibility of women offenders—especially those from marginalized backgrounds—presents a gap in the understanding of crime and punishment, which upholds men offenders as the norm and perpetuates gender inequality.

Women prisoners in the Philippines are a minority within a minority and remain invisible in academic discussions and public debates on crime. Information about them consists of reports by non-government organizations (NGOs), internship reports, and journalistic articles (Amnesty International, 1997; Amnesty International, 2003a; Aning, 2004; Buenaventura, 2005; Dawson & Gregory, 2004; Duff & Islam, 2005; Jimenez-David, 2004; Labro, 2004; Martinez, 2007; Palasi, 2003; Sibugan, 2005). Women formerly on death row in the country are even more invisible and make up another minority (sub) group. When they were still on death row, they were the nation's forgotten offenders, given their smaller numbers (3%) in the death row population (Free Legal Assistance Group [FLAG], 2004; National Statistical Coordination Board [NCSB], 2003; Philippine Human Rights Information Center [PhilRights] & Women's Education, Development Productivity and Research Organization [WEDPRO], 2006). Women's experiences and issues were lumped under those of men on death row (Coronel, 2006; Gluckman, 1999a; Simbulan, n.d.) and even trivialized, as the following article illustrates:

Death Row is just another room in what looks like an old high school. Inmates lounge around in pajamas on tiny cots. With its bunk beds and posters of film and basketball stars, the place looks like a sorority sleep-over. (Gluckman 1999b, par. 12)

Prior to this research, only one study had been conducted on women on death row (PhilRights & WEDPRO, 2006). Amnesty International's (2003b) report on Filipino youth offenders on death row included a woman, but focused on juvenile justice laws. Additionally, these reports relied on small sample sizes. Women formerly on death row remain invisible as they continue to serve life sentences without parole (Javellana-Santos, 2006; Labog-Javellana, Tubeza, & Ubac, 2006; Pabico, 2006). No follow-up studies on their situation have been conducted since the abolition of capital punishment in June 2006.

Research Question

This paper asks: What were the circumstances that led to the incarceration and sentencing of women formerly on death row in the Philippines? It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine whether the respondents were telling the truth about the crimes of which they had been convicted. This study focused on how the women framed their pathways to prison and death row, based on their understanding of their identities, relationships, and social worlds.

I engaged in extensive participant-observation at the Correctional Institution for Women (CIW) in Mandaluyong City and the Correctional Institution for Women-Mindanao (CIW-Mindanao) in Davao del Norte for one year and six months. In-depth interviews were conducted with 27 women formerly on death row, nine family members of the inmates, and eight prison staff. Document analysis was undertaken regarding prison and dormitory rules, research reports and articles on capital punishment and incarcerated women, and other pertinent sources.

This study utilized “grounded theory,” an approach intended for qualitative research that is not suited for methods of hypothesis testing. One starts with individual cases and progresses to more abstract conceptual categories. Drawing upon the data, one identifies patterned relationships (Charmaz, 2003). Field observations and in-depth interviews set the stage for the theoretical framework of this ethnographic study.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized Goffman’s (1961) concept of career, defined as “any social strand of any person’s course through life” (p. 128) that embodies a moral aspect, involving transitions in the negotiation of one’s identity and framework for judging oneself and others. This research examined turning points in the women’s criminal careers, namely the period of their lives prior to their incarceration, and the in-prison period of their lives. The latter is further divided into their experiences on death row and their experiences as inmates on life imprisonment—without parole, in

most cases—after the abolition of capital punishment.

This research further incorporated Daly’s (1992) “pathways to felony court” approach (pp. 13-14), which emphasizes three main causes of law-breaking among women and girls: survival, resistance to crime, and economic and/or physical victimization. These pathways highlight the complexity of women’s motives for illegal activity and the role of their subordinate social status and limited social opportunities. The relevance of this perspective to the situation of the respondents was limited to the women inmates who admitted their culpability in the offenses of which they were convicted. As such, this study also utilized Richie’s (1996) gender entrapment theory, which states that women take part in illegal activity due to violence, the threat of violence, or coercion by their male partners or similar constraints in their intimate or close relationships. This perspective resonates with the experiences of the majority of the respondents, whose experiences of social marginalization led to their unwitting involvement or implication in the offenses of their significant networks.

Overview of the Women’s Cases

What brought women to death row in the Philippines? Two-thirds of the respondents were convicted of violent and/or property crimes, such as kidnapping-related offenses (13 women), parricide (two women), murder (one woman), “carnapping” (car theft) with murder (one woman), and arson with homicide (one woman). The remainder were convicted of drug-related offenses (see Table 1).

Table 1 *Offenses Allegedly Committed by Women Formerly on Death Row in the Philippines*

Offense	Frequency
Murder-related offenses	4
Parricide	2
Murder	1
Carnapping with murder	1
Kidnapping-related offenses	13
Kidnapping for ransom	9
Kidnapping with homicide	1
Kidnapping with murder	1
Kidnapping with rape and/or robbery	2
Drug-related offenses	9
Drug trafficking	5
Drug trafficking and drug possession	1
Drug trafficking, drug use, and possession of drug paraphernalia	1
Drug possession	2
Arson with homicide	1
Total	27

A closer look at the women's offenses debunks stereotypes of extremely violent, non-traditional women criminals, as traditional criminology depicts them (Davis, 2003; Gillespie, 2003; Pollock, 1999; Watterson, 1996). All but five of the respondents were identified as accomplices, as opposed to the masterminds, in the offenses of which they were convicted.

Research shows the secondary role women play in crimes across different cultures (Belknap, 2001; Gillespie, 2003; Morgan, 2007; Palasi, 2003; Richie, 1996). The majority of the respondents (24 women) were charged of offenses with others. Eight women were accused of crimes committed with another individual, and five others of crimes committed with two people. Two women were accused of committing crimes with three people, and three others of committing crimes with four people. Two women were accused of crimes committed with six people, and two others of crimes committed crimes with seven people. The rest were accused of crimes committed with 10 people (see Table 2).

Table 2 *Number of Co-Accused Parties of Respondents*

Number of Co-Accused Parties	Frequency
None: Crime committed alone	3
1 person	8
2 people	5
3 people	2
4 people	3
6 people	2
7 people	2
10 people	2
Total	27

Together, 11 women were related to their co-accused parties in multiple ways, in that their co-defendants were their partners, children, siblings, relatives, in-laws, friends or acquaintances, and people they had never met before their arrest. Others described their co-accused parties as their partners (three women), siblings (one woman), friends or acquaintances (six women), and employee (one woman). One woman had no prior relationship with

her co-defendant, whom she met after her arrest. Another did not disclose her relationship with her co-accused party (see Table 3).

Table 3 *Respondents' Relationships With Their Co-Accused Parties*

Nature of Relationship of Co-accused Parties	Frequency
Acquaintance/s or friends	6
Partner	3
Siblings	1
Employee	1
Multiple relationships with co-accused parties	11
No prior relationship	1
Undisclosed	1
Total	24

Ten women admitted that they were guilty of the crimes of which they were convicted. The majority (17 women) said they were wrongfully convicted, in that they were framed for crimes or implicated in the offenses of their significant networks. The women's assertions support the possibility that there have been significant miscarriages of justice. Other observers have concluded that this is the case (Asian Human Rights Commission Hong Kong [AHRC], 2007; Asian Legal Rights Center Hong Kong [ALRC], 2007; Amnesty International, 1997; Dawson & Gregory, 2004; David, 2004; Joint Civil Society [JCS], 2009; Lamban, n.d.; Sibugan, 2005).

Twenty-two women had no prior criminal records, although this was not deemed a mitigating factor in their sentencing. Only five women were previously charged with prior offenses, such as parricide (for killing one's father in self-defense during a rape), slight physical injury, unlawful entry and robbery with violence, and drug possession. Four cases were dismissed for lack of evidence. Only one respondent had a pending case for unlawful entry and robbery with violence, in addition to the offense of which she was convicted.

Seventeen women—including the five women mentioned above—were involved with other unlawful or illegal activities as adolescents and/or adults, although they were not arrested for these. Their past offenses included: running away as minors (seven women), prostitution (three women), drug and/or alcohol abuse (eight women), drug trafficking (two women), “double-dipping” into scholarship funds (one woman), illegal gambling (one woman), immigration violations (four women), and working for an organized crime syndicate (two women). These women largely committed non-violent offenses and/or offenses that involved their own victimization. They ended up on death row for other crimes—and in the case of some, for their implication in the crimes of significant networks.

The limited criminal histories of women formerly on death row in the Philippines resembles that of women on death row in the United States, who had lower rates of involvement in violent crime and figured in minor crimes before their arrest (Morgan, 2007; Schulberg, 2007). In fact, studies show that the majority of women prisoners around the world were neither violent nor repeat offenders prior to their arrest (Banks, 2003; Bloom et al., 2003; Carlen, 1999; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Covington & Bloom, 2003; Gilfus, 1992; Leonard, 2002; Morris & Kingi, 1999; Pollock, 2010; Raeder, 2003; Sharp & Eriksen, 2003; Watterson, 1996). The social context in which the respondents committed the crimes that led them to death row, despite their limited criminal histories, needs to be examined.

Results

The respondents' narratives illuminate four pathways to prison and death row: 1) direct or symbolic retaliation for abuse and victimization; 2) “hard living” and economic need; 3) substance abuse issues; and 4) deception and betrayal in close relationships. There is considerable variation in women's specific experiences, perceptions, and motivations for committing crimes—and in the case of a significant number of women, the social locations and relations that place them at risk for being implicated in the

offenses of others. Illegal activity among women is rarely isolated from the consequences of men's social and economic domination, poverty, racism and colonial oppression, and disproportionate child care responsibilities (Covington & Bloom, 2003; Girshick, 1999; Owen, 2003; Palasi, 2003; Radosh, 2004; Richie, 1996; Van Wormer & Bartollas, 2000; Watterson, 1996). Women formerly on death row in the Philippines were there because of their gender, social class, race/ethnicity, nationality, and age. The women's social positions informed their experiences with the criminal justice system and their treatment by law enforcement authorities (Brancaleone, 2004; Buenaventura, 2005; Duff & Islam, 2005; Gamolo, 2008; Pabico, 2000b; PhilRights & WEDPRO, 2006; Villero, 2006).

Direct or Symbolic Retaliation for Abuse and Victimization

Women's violence is situated action in response to inequalities of gender, race/ethnicity, and class, among others (Girshick, 1999; J. Miller, 1998; S. Miller, 2005; Schram & Koons-Witt, 2004). While women around the world are capable of violence, their use of violence in relationships should be understood in the context of intimate partner abuse (Kruttschnitt, 2001). Research shows that women's violence is often directed against intimate partners or family members out of self-defense (Belknap & Potter, 2006; Leonard, 2003; Osthoff, 2001; Renzetti, 2006).

Various forms of women's criminality stem from efforts to cope with or resist abusive or violent relationships (Belknap, 1996; Birch, 1994; Chesney-Lind, 2002; Daly, 1992; Richie, 1996). The prevalence of abuse among women cuts across race/ethnicity, nationality, class, educational attainment, and age. Differences in social locations account for variations in the patterns of abuse (Leonard, 2003; Martinez, 2007; Palasi, 2003; Platek, 1999; PhilRights & WEDPRO, 2006; Richie, 1996; Watterson, 1996). For women who are isolated and/or wary of legal systems, taking the life of an abusive partner is an alternative to end abuse (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004a; Comack, 2006; Jimenez-David, 2004; Labro,

2004; Radford, 1994).

Domestic homicides committed by women tend to be defensive and victim-precipitated, often directed against physically and sexually abusive husbands, ex-husbands, or partners (Anderson, 2006; Ferraro, 2006; Jones, 1996; Kaukinen, Gover, & Hays, 2006; Leonard, 2002; Owen, 2003; Radford, 1994; Watterson, 1996). This fits with the story of one respondent. She disclosed that her husband, who often beat her, attacked her after she refused to have sex with him shortly after she had a miscarriage, leading her to hit him with a steel pipe. She ran to the *barangay* (village) headquarters to ask for help. When the police went to her house to arrest her husband, they found him dead. If no complainant had come forward, she would have been released from custody. Yet her sister-in-law decided to press charges. The Philippine legal system put her on trial for her own victimization by framing the killing of her husband as murder, rather than a response motivated by self-defense.

Domestic violence and self-defense are not the sole cause of homicides by women (Leonard, 2003). Women prisoners often resort to violence due to other forms of victimization, especially in resistance to those who harm their children (Gilfus, 1992; Miller, 1998; Morris & Kingi, 1999; Owen, 2003). One respondent was convicted of murdering her estranged husband, to whom she had entrusted her children, only to find out that he had passed on the responsibility to his sister. She plotted to kill him after finding out about her children's experiences of physical and sexual abuse by their cousins, aggravated by her ex-husband's apathy and denial. Her retaliation for the abuse of her children and other festering issues with her estranged husband and in-laws could be framed as an act of "grassroots justice."

Research also shows a link between past experiences of sexual and physical violence and violent crime among women and girls (Britton, 2004; Gilfus, 1992; Miller, 1986; Richie, 1996). Victimization marginalizes adolescent girls and sets them up for illegal activity and re-victimization, in that prior experiences of abuse lead them to situations that involve them in crime and make them vulnerable to violence (Chesney-Lind, 2001a, 2001b;

Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004a). Other studies show a complex, indirect relationship between victimization and offending among girls and women. Victimized girls and women use survival tactics leading to delinquency and crime, such as running away, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, fraud, or accepting job offers or invitations for companionship leading to crime (Chesney-Lind, 1997, 2002; Chesney-Lind & Okamoto, 2003; Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 2004; Covington & Bloom, 2003; Gilfus, 1992; Owen, 2003; Watterson, 1996). The link between victimization and criminalization is evident in the life of another respondent, who, at the age of 12, killed her father in self-defense when he raped her. Her victimization introduced her to the criminal justice system—and her entrapment in an organized crime syndicate, which she attempted to leave by working at a strip club, only to be lured back to the syndicate through a regular customer, whom she married shortly. After hearing about the plan of her husband and her best friend to kill his cousin due to a financial dispute, she orchestrated the crime herself and conspired in the theft of the victim's tricycle. Her account illuminates the repercussions of her complex history of abuse. Her prior experiences of violence propelled her to greater violence, which she participated in, seeking the attention she had been deprived of.

“Hard Living” and Economic Need

Many women turn to crime because limited education, low-paying jobs, and the lack of stable, legal employment constrain them from supporting themselves and their families (Belknap, 1996; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004a; Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 2004; Daly, 1992). Four respondents had these experiences. “Hard living” (Howell, 1991, p. 6), defined as a perspective centered on problems of daily living and personal relationships, informed these women's involvement in kidnapping and drug-related offenses.

The link between hard living and kidnapping was evident in the accounts of two respondents. Before their incarceration, one woman owned several businesses, while the other worked as her secretary

in exchange for her college education. Hard living was evident in their accounts of growing up in impoverished families in rural communities before they landed in prison. Both women admitted to conspiring in the kidnapping of a five-year-old girl. While they pointed to each other as the mastermind of their crime, their contradictory narratives reveal the consequences of hard living and economic need, as well as the negotiation of cultural values, such as *pakikisama* (cooperation) and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), in the face of illegal activity. For the respondent who then worked as a businesswoman, hard living informed her amoral support for her secretary's crime. For the respondent who worked as a secretary, hard living led her to comply with her boss's kidnapping scheme out of indebtedness and to serve as the “fall guy” in exchange for receiving money while in prison, which she had planned on using to finish her studies after her release. In any case, hard living explains these women's lax attitudes toward the law and their passive acceptance of their incarceration.

Meanwhile, the link between hard living and drug-dealing was evident in the accounts of two other respondents. Drug-dealing posed an alternative income-generating activity, given the lack of legitimate jobs and women's marginalized status and disproportionate relational responsibilities, as is the case in other countries (Bush-Baskette, 2004; Carlen, 1999; Davis, 2003; George, 1999; Martin, 2006; Owen, 2003; Radosh, 2004; Richie, 1996; Rolison, Bates, Poole, & Jacob, 2002). Despite the poverty or downward mobility of their families of origin, both women obtained a post-secondary education. As they had limited employment opportunities, both women either smuggled *shabu* (crystal methamphetamine hydrochloride) to and from Hong Kong or sold it locally. A common thread in their narratives is how drug-dealing was part of their gendered caretaking and economic responsibilities toward their families. Male jealousy also impacted their drug dealing or arrest. The jealous husband of one respondent undermined her economic self-sufficiency by closing down her businesses, leading her to become a drug courier. The brother-in-law of the other respondent reported her due to jealousy over her ability to support

his family and compensate for his inadequacies. The women were vulnerable to arrest due to their more visible lower-level distribution roles in the male-dominated drug trade (Britton, 2004; Maher & Daly, 2004; Radosh, 2004; Steffensmeier & Allan, 2006). Despite being first-time offenders, they received the death penalty, while key players in the drug economy remain free (Morella & Agence France-Presse, 2011; Orejas, 2008; Orejas & Gonzaga, 2008).

Substance Abuse Issues

Drug use is a common pathway to prison among women globally (Bush-Baskette, 2004; Gilbert, 1999; Maher & Daly, 2004; Radosh, 2004; Sharp & Eriksen, 2003; Watterson, 1996). It also informs women's increasing incarceration rate in the Philippines, given the severe penalties for drug offenses (Lopez, 2007; Martinez, 2007; Pabico, 2000a). The adoption of stringent anti-drug laws in the country, which are modeled after those of the U.S., is consistent with the way most Southeast Asian countries have handled or treated drug-related crimes—that is, by categorizing drug offenses as capital offenses (Gluckman, 1999a; Pabico, 2000b; PhilRights & WEDPRO, 2006; Tagayuna, 2004). In the Philippines, drug penalties are based solely on the amount of drug possessed or sold. Sentences for drug cases have gone beyond the prescribed limits stipulated in the Dangerous Drugs Act, and ranged from a minimum of life imprisonment to the maximum penalty of death, prior to the abolition of capital punishment in June 2006 (Pabico, 2000a). Regardless of the abolition of the death penalty, excessive sentences for drug felonies persist (Bewley-Taylor, Hallam, & Allen, 2009; Galang, 2009; Lopez, 2007; “Penalties for Drug-Related Crime in Asia,” 2009). These trends disproportionately impact women offenders in the Philippines, such that the rate at which women are getting convicted for drug charges outpaces that of men (Pabico 2000a, 2000b, 2007). This describes the situation of three respondents, who were convicted of drug related dealing and property offenses.

Women may sell drugs not only for money, but also to maintain their drug habit (Chesney-Lind

& Rodriguez, 2004; Covington & Bloom, 2003; Covington, 2004; Maher, Dunlap, & Johnson, 2006; Pollock, 1999; Pollock-Byrne, 2002). Drug use and drug-related crimes often occur through drug-involved male intimate partners (Belknap, 1996; Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 2004; McShane & Williams, 2006; Richie, 1996; Steffensmeier & Allan, 2004). Other significant networks, such as family members and friends, influence women's drug use and drug-related crimes (Boyd, 2004; Joe Laidler, 1996; Maher & Daly, 2004; Maher et al., 2006; Martin, 2006; Ogbonna & Nordin, 2009). Drug abuse intensifies economically-motivated crimes and leads to women's relationships with drug-connected men, who make them accessories (Miller, 1986; McShane & Williams, 2006; Richie, 1996; Steffensmeier & Allan, 2004). Such is the story of two respondents, who were convicted of drug trafficking—and in the case of one woman, additional offenses, such as drug use and possession of drug paraphernalia. Although they invoked economic motives, drug dependency solidified their participation in the drug economy. For one woman, her partners influenced her drug use, which led to her involvement in drug-dealing. Her second husband, whom she met through the drug trade, also made her his accomplice. As for the other respondent, her drug career could be traced to her in-laws' drug use and drug-dealing, her husband's drug habit, and peer pressure. Her husband's friends eventually ordered her to buy *shabu* for them—a practice known as “copping' drugs” (Maher & Daly, 2004, p. 138)—and sell it in smaller amounts. This paved the way for her entry into the drug economy. The arrests of both respondents occurred through the *palit-ulo* (switching of heads) system, which allows drug offenders to incriminate others for lighter sentences or their release (Bernstein, 2003; Boyd, 2004; Logarta, 2009).

Research also illustrates the link between women's drug use and property crime (Bloom et al., 2003, 2004; Covington, 2004; Davies & Cook, 1999). This describes the story of one respondent, who committed arson with homicide as a result of experimenting with *shabu* after her girlfriend, a regular drug user, left their house after an altercation. Her state of mind led her to start a fire, which razed their neighbor's houses and

killed an elderly man, who had difficulty walking. She later moved and confessed to the crime, although she maintained that the lone casualty had lost the will to live and thus refused to be rescued. Residents then reported her to the police. She responded passively to her sentence.

Deception and Betrayal in Close Relationships

Being framed and dragged into the crimes of others was the most common pathway to death row. Indeed, 17 women claimed that they landed in prison for murder, kidnapping-, and drug-related offenses that they did not commit. Guilt by association was a significant factor in their arrest and conviction. A recurring theme in their accounts was their experiences of deception and betrayal by trusted individuals and/or institutions, such as their partners, family members, friends, acquaintances, the police, politicians who protected police officers who controlled the drug trade, and other more influential agents, such as individuals who reported them in exchange for a lighter sentence or in retaliation for attempts to escape organized crime syndicates. Deception pertains to the use of false pretenses and/or conspiracies to entrap and implicate the women in illegal activity. Betrayal pertains to the treachery or desertion committed in the women's close relationships or the public institutions that they had relied upon in their time of need.

Some women disclosed that the culprits behind the crimes of which they were convicted continued to operate with impunity. Their narratives illuminated irregularities in their treatment by law enforcement agents, such as warrantless arrests, intimidation, ill-treatment, planted evidence, forced confessions, coached witnesses, and torture. Their experiences fit with findings about anomalies in the Philippine criminal justice system and procedural lapses in the arraignment and trial of suspects (AHRC, 2007; Amnesty International, 2002; Demetillo & Dauigoy, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2009; Joint Civil Society, 2009; Lamban, n.d.; Palasi, 2003; Quismundo, 2008; Salaverria & Carvajal, 2007; Simbulan, n.d.).

Two women were implicated in their partners' crimes, namely murder and kidnapping with murder.

They related their prior experiences of gendered abuse and powerlessness in restraining their violent male partners. Four respondents were implicated in kidnappings committed by family members. The women revealed that these people engaged in crimes and, in some cases, conspired with associates to implicate them.

Five women—including one who was only 17 during her arrest—were implicated in the kidnapping and drug-related offenses of their peers, acquaintances, supervisors, and current or former drug customers. One woman claimed she was framed by the police and an influential politician for drug trafficking and described her speedy trial and the murder of her lawyer-husband, as a conspiracy.

Five respondents were implicated in the kidnapping and drug offenses of their significant networks, including a husband, a sibling, in-laws, and friends or acquaintances. Corrupt police officers compounded the situation by falsifying the charges against them to obtain money from them. The women's accounts must be contextualized vis-à-vis systemic corruption in law enforcement (Andrade, 2011a, 2011b; Cervantes, 2011a, 2011b; Delfin, 2008, 2009a; Papa, 2006; "Solon Fumes Mad," 2011; "4 Angeles Cops Sacked," 2011). Being connected to or acquainted with people involved in kidnapping and drug trafficking rackets, they were easy targets. Their social class and limited education made them vulnerable to abuses of police discretion, such as arbitrary and warrantless arrests, fabricated charges, and extortion attempts in exchange for their release, despite the knowledge of their innocence.

Negotiating Culpability and Blamelessness

Women formerly on death row in the Philippines have four pathways to prison—ongoing or prior victimization, "hard living" and economic need, substance abuse, and deception and betrayal in close, trusted relationships. Daly's (1992) "pathways to felony court" approach illustrates how women and girls run afoul of the law in their attempts to survive, resist crime, and deal with economic and/or physical victimization. Meanwhile, Richie's (1996)

gender entrapment theory exposes women's limited options on account of their gender and other markers of difference. The women were in marginalized positions in their families and relationships, at work, and in society in general. Their crimes resulted from their efforts to survive and cope with their circumstances.

In the first three pathways, the women's narratives reflect how they negotiated the fine line between victimization and agency. In describing their motives for their crimes, they frequently appropriated "vocabularies of victimization" (Dunn, 2010, p. 6)—that is, the portrayal of victims as helpless and blameless to elicit compassion and support. They appealed to popular cultural understandings to distinguish between blameless and blameworthy victims. Killing a husband in self-defense or in retaliation for child abuse is a more acceptable cultural narrative. So is selling drugs out of poverty and/or the need to support family members. By contrast, murder, arson, and kidnappings go against the grain of cultural expectations. Vocabularies of motive, such as *utang na loob* and *pakikisama* in the face of crime, and compensation for past abuses and deprivations, help deflect responsibility from the women. The portrayal of murder or homicide victims as inherently immoral or suicidal downplays the gravity of their crimes. In telling their stories, the women recalled how they ran afoul of the law in hindsight, and memory can be selective. At any rate, the women's narratives reflect what was central in the women's understanding of their identities, their social worlds, and their law violations.

The women also framed themselves as subjects by asserting their control over their actions. Though the exercise of their agency resulted in their criminalization, their activities reflect their responses to cultural pressures to support themselves and their significant networks, in a society where they have few options on account of their gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, social class, educational attainment, age, and other social locating factors. Engaging in violence in self-defense and retaliating against prolonged violence were survival strategies. Kidnapping for ransom and drug dealing were motivated by economic need and oftentimes justified by relational

responsibilities. Drug use and addiction was an alternative to the lack of employment or education, and drug-induced crime was a way to get money to maintain their drug habit or to cope with relational troubles. While the women's motives were frequently misunderstood, their actions seemed reasonable—if not, their only choice—in their worldview, given their disempowered social positions and conflict-ridden environment.

As for the last pathway, the women's narratives reflect a pervasive sense of victimization, in the sense of framing themselves as objectified in their relationships and with limited decision-making capabilities. They appropriated vocabularies of victimization in their accounts, even more so than the other respondents, who admitted their culpability in their offenses. The women's accounts of their crimes—regardless of the discrepancies in some accounts—must be interpreted in this context. Their claims of being set up or dragged into the crimes of their significant networks resonate with their culturally-defined gender roles and behaviors, such as morality, passivity, submissiveness, and relationship-centeredness. On the one hand, narratives of deception and betrayal by scheming partners, family members, friends, acquaintances, and police officers absolve them of any responsibility for their situation. On the other hand, their vocabularies of motive—coercion and entrapment in illegal activity, police brutality and ill treatment, and wrongful conviction due to poverty, racism, or politicking—are scripts that mirror Philippine social realities.

The women's accounts of deception and betrayal illuminate the dark side of the significant networks and/or institutions that facilitated their entry into the criminal justice system. Mainstream culture portrays families, intimate partners, and friendships as sources of support and protection. Yet these same people exploited close relationships by implicating the women and leaving them to suffer extremely harsh punishments for offenses they did not commit. Guilt by association led to the women's entrapment in violent acts by partners or implication in the illegal rackets of their family members, friends, or acquaintances. In some cases, their backgrounds and lifestyles might have reflected conditions of "settled

living” (Howell, 1991, p. 6), in contrast to hard living. Transcending status boundaries and associating with individuals immersed in hard living had detrimental consequences for them, by making them vulnerable to deception and betrayal, thus their criminalization.

Individuals from backgrounds that reflect “settled living” have more confidence in the ability of law enforcement officials to protect the general public. The women’s narratives illustrate that this is rarely the case for those in disenfranchised social positions, those who cross status boundaries, and those who side with the disadvantaged despite their positions of relative privilege. In their world, trusted institutions, such as the police and government officials, emerge as agents of corruption and victimization. The protections of the middle class—and the dominant culture, in the case of racial and ethnic minorities—are often unavailable to them.

The respondents in this study were compelled to engage in or coerced to comply with and/or cover up for illegal activity because of their experiences of violence in their intimate or close relationships, the culturally-specific gender roles that they were socialized into, and their marginalized social position in general. The patriarchal nature of Philippine society effectively devalues the status of women, as compared with men. Women’s conflicts with the law cannot be isolated from their problems and concerns due to the constraints of living in an environment with multiple, intersecting inequalities along the lines of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, social class, educational attainment, age, and other markers of difference. The respondents’ experiences of social marginalization led to their involvement in crime—and in most cases, entrapment in the offenses of members of their significant networks. Their social position, coupled with the flaws in the Philippine criminal justice system, explains why they were criminalized, as opposed to being regarded as victims of crimes.

It is beyond the scope of this study to determine whether the women’s accounts are authentic or inventions. What is crucial is how they framed—and indeed, chose to frame—the circumstances that brought them to death row, based on their understanding of their identities, their relationships,

and their social worlds. Their narratives reflect social realities—and in many cases, facets of low-income and working class culture—with invaluable lessons to be learned. The women’s accounts of casual violence against specific men and even other women and children, drug abuse and/or drug dealing in response to hard living, victimization in close relationships, corruption and whitewashing on the part of government institutions and law enforcement agencies, and fatalism and passivity in the face of injustice, illuminate the dynamics of their conflict-ridden world. In this world, they had to pay for their crimes—and in many other cases, the crimes of others—by enduring the loss of freedom and separation from their close relationships.

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