A large body of work exists on representation of women in popular culture, yet, notwithstanding extensive analysis of women in film noir and neo-noir, violent female criminals do not receive much scholarly attention. This study aims to rectify this by exploring the representations of violent female criminals in popular culture, the social fantasies associated with these representations and the changes they undergo over time. Five episodes of a popular murder mystery series Columbo, representing female murderers, were analyzed using semiotics and Stuart Hall’s theory of representation. The study is positioned within a larger theoretical framework of criminology and media studies. The data analysis suggests that when violent women are represented, they are demonized, pathologized and sexualized. The projection of “bad” or “mad” fantasies onto violent women allows society to expunge them from the social order and mask the fantasy of female power and its disruptive effect on gender boundaries. Though primary categories of representation of violent women have not changed, as time goes by, they are expanded and supplemented by new representations such as victimization and emancipation. The data suggests that representation of female criminals draws heavily on theories of female criminality, yet the range of the representations remains extremely limited.

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gender
crime
representation
media studies
semiotics

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**Additional information**