
Gender Stereotyping On Females and Gender Representation In Media

Female criminals have always received the greatest media attention. Mass media shapes how we perceive the world whether that be good, bad, positive, immoral. Our understanding of the role of women offenders in crime is shaped by the reputation of this environment. This essay will analyse the press release of criminal women and will focus on the media attention they receive to that of their counterparts. The perception of them being mad, and other factors such as sexualisation and ethnicity which sensationalises female offenders in the mass media. It will explore the reasoning behind why media depicts female offenders in such ways to accomplish a critical understanding, to establish if the representations are actually distorted in any way, beginning with attention received for said female victims in comparison to that of male offenders.

Roughly one third of news coverage of crime related reports in tabloids will cover women who have committed crimes, but in the criminal statistics it is around one in ten. Media has always had a fascination with female offenders, yet the same cannot be said for men. This evidence was very clear in the media representation of Maxine Carr. In 2003, Ian Huntley was arrested and convicted for the murder of two young girls whilst his partner, Maxine was arrested and charged for conspiring to pervert the course of justice. Ian Huntley received life imprisonment, whilst Maxine received three and half years. The investigation represented in the newspaper of Maxine and Ian found images of Maxine were far higher than that of Ian, portraying her as a lying, manipulative person who played a more central part in the killing of the girls.

Headlines had readers believing that she had placed the bodies in her car, with an image of her next to said headlines, but with no images of Ian Huntley to be seen. Jones and Wardle suggest that this work portrayed how visual montage and juxtaposition is utilised by media to distort images of female criminals. But why are

female criminals examined so much by the media? The media interest in females' criminals stems from gender stereotyping imposed on females by our society and gender representation in media . There is an acceptance of common-sense assumptions of female behaviour. Traditional female roles are often closely tied with being naturally caring, emotional and maternal. The traditional roles of men are often associated with crime, whereas the roles of women be controversial. It is though that if a woman commits a crime through violence, she deviates from female norm.

They challenge our stereotypes, not simply about crime, but also about the capabilities associated with that gender. The offender is depicted as a sinful woman who not only violates the law but is also endowed with social and moral values and roles. Women only receive light coverage in media if the crimes committed are not a violation of their gender stereotype, whilst those committing violent crimes receive harsher coverage. As a result, they suggested a patriarchal hypothesis highlighting a type of crime and how it is linked to gender expectation, shapes news coverage.

This explains the role of gender stereotypes in portraying the female villain in the media. The

obsession with female offenders becomes clearer if we assume that they deviate from the norm and are no longer considered as 'women'. Realism is such that real women do not commit crimes, therefore those who do, cannot surely be thought of as real women. Media attempts to give importance to female criminals on their lack of traditional norms such as caring and emotional, nurturing and loving; a clear theme seen in the representation of children's nurse Beverly Allitt. Dubbed 'The Angel of Death', Beverly's crimes against children she cared for, betraying the trust she was given was clearly contrary to her crime.

Though a clearly dangerous person, the level to which her crimes have been dealt with utter shock and then moral panic, emulated the intensity to which as a nurse, looking after children destroyed the reflection of female qualities cherished by society.

Instead of her name being used in the headlines, the word 'nurse' was used instead, showing how the media homed in on her crime as an abuse of her nursing role. Emphasising on her lack of emotion during the court case, they scrutinised her masculine appearance commenting on her weight loss stripped her back to reveal a boyish figure. However, female criminals are not only portrayed as cold, non-women, or masculine, but sometimes as monsters as well. There is often a sensationalism of female criminals by painting them as manipulative and deceitful monsters. Thus, more reason for media interest in female offenders for the deviancy from the norm

But, the idea that a lot of media attention is given to a woman is often contradictory. It is suggested that women are underrepresented in the media and that relatively few women are portrayed in the mass media although women are fifty one percent of the population. An explanation could be that these women do not actually meet the ideology of the 'woman' permitting media the coverage of them. The media portrays female villains not only as non-women, doubly deviant, but also often as mad. Being labelled as mad would give the offender the opportunity of victim status.

Of murderous women, consideration deviated to their mental wellbeing and be recorded as recorded as receiving psychiatric care in a mental health setting, leading us to believe that mental health disorders are commonplace when coverage of these women takes place and are used at the discretion of the journalist. The media is focusing on the female criminal's state of mind instead of her actions, leading to a reduced realistic presentation of the criminal. However, the reality remains that mental health issues in women is much higher than men.

Society, media and The Criminal Justice System find it difficult to accept a woman's violent offences unless she is labelled as a lunatic or unstable. Therefore it is then debated that male offenders are thought of as more balanced, being led by their heads rather than biological make up and consequently less likely thought of as being mad. When a male commits murder, it is conceivable and even seen as fallible, unfortunately this does not hold the same for women as all forms of male crime is regularly expressed.

To conclude, there is no singular proposal to media discourse of female offenders. Women do in fact attract high levels of media attention as is evident in the case of Maxine Carr. In addition, the media are a common factor in describing women offenders and misrepresenting the facts of the crimes. In the case of Ms Carr, the imagery used in newspapers bent the truth on her part in the crime. Additionally, it was found that women come up against negative media accounts if there is an infringement on societies gender norms, this being evident in Beverly Allitts case.

However, leniency is given if a woman is thought to be suffering from a mental illness.

These persuasive components detract the media from concentrating on the issues in hand... the actual committed crimes, thus showing us how gender influences media representation. However, actuality is not altogether distorted in the representation of women as mad, as a higher percentage of women suffer with mental health conditions than that of men. Media scrutiny on female offenders portrayed as mad and bad comes from their nonconformity of gender stereotypes and biological slant of the female form. The media image of female offenders also has a big impact on The Criminal Justice System as well as society.

The media have the ability to depict a mental representation of offenders deserving of mercy to those who are not, making it crucial for a correct image of female offenders to be evident in the media. A continuing investigation into the portrayal of female criminals and the circumstances influencing media factors is fundamental in the equality and future determination of female offenders.

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