Imagining the Unimaginable: Psychopathy, (Un)Criminality and the Body

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Author: Disanto, Julianne Margaret

Abstract: Many scholars have noted that representations of crime and criminality cannot be divorced from considerations of power relations, especially in the way that they often reproduce derogatory and stereotypical images of socially marginalized individuals and groups. By extension, scholars have also analyzed how these images affect how socially normalized subjects are represented as pre-emptively innocent, normal, unimaginably criminal or un-criminal. In such instances, normalized subjects who commit violent crimes are often pathologized in the news. This dissertation departs from these observations and joins this conversation by exploring how the unimaginable criminality of the normalized subject becomes imaginable through psychopathy. Scholars in the area of critical psychopathy research and those who study the intersections between crime, identity/difference and representation have not explored how the logic of psychopathy complements and aligns with cultural imaginings of (un)criminality in the contemporary context. This is my contribution to these areas. Historical researchers of psychopathy have noted that psychopathy was imagined in relation to the body, identity and the normative social order (e.g. Rimke 2003; 2005; Lunbeck 1994). Drawing on their methodologies and insights, I explore this relationship in the contemporary context by analyzing the news representations of five Canadian criminal cases - the cases of Russell Williams; Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka; Lisa Neve; Robert Pickton; and, Charles Kembo. Using a Foucauldian discourse analysis and Alison Youngs (1996) imagination approach to crime and criminality, I demonstrate that psychopathy is amenable to representing the otherwise unimaginable criminality of the normalized subject because of the way that psychopathy is conceptualized through duality: the psychopath appears to be normal which hides their underlying pathology/transgressiveness (e.g. Hare 1999; Rhodes 2002; Weisman 2008). I also make the related argument that representations of psychopathy are bound to a series of interlocking bodily contingencies (e.g. identity and difference), relating to both offenders and their victims. These contingencies affect the work that psychopathy does in constructing criminality, as well as the work that it does not need to do as exemplified by its absence. I conclude by detailing the implications of this study and avenues for future research.

Keywords: Psychopathy, Body as a text, Identity and difference, Cultural criminology, Discourse analysis, Representations of criminality

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Psychopaths in high places. Despite staggering differences between the cultures and peoples spread across the globe, most citizens of the world describe their own caste of politicians with identical words of anger, contempt and alienation. Dane Wigington GeoengineeringWatch.org The US government and the western power structure as a whole is completely out of control. Though there is no denying the corruption and criminality. USA Watchdog News Site Covers Critical Climate Engineering Issue. Greg Hunter is a highly respected veteran news reporter who has worked for many major news networks in the past.