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EXTREMES OF OTHERNESS: MEDIA IMAGES OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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Abstract

This article explores mediated extremes of otherness, and the fluid relationships between different categories of deviant. It considers the role of popular media discourses as sites of 'inclusion and exclusion', and conceptualises the demonisation of 'others' as existing along a spectrum of deviance. At one end of the spectrum are 'stigmatised others'; those less serious offenders who are portrayed as being of society but not in it. At the other end of the spectrum are 'absolute others'; the most serious offenders portrayed as being in society but not of it. While our analysis is informed by a range of classic theories and concepts, it seeks to refract existing research approaches through a lens which focuses on alternative aspects of the crime-media nexus. In particular, we aim to develop a more

reflexive level of explanation by using psychoanalytic theory to problematise public fear of loathing, and propose that large sections of society may share more in common with certain categories of deviant than they care outwardly to acknowledge. We suggest that the repulsion expressed through the popular media to particular forms of offending facilitates the continued public denial of the fact that those who commit crimes are not 'others'. They are 'us', and are of our making.

Introduction

We appear to live in a time of unprecedented concern about crime, an age in which narratives of 'individual' causes of 'social' decline' are endlessly and cyclically reproduced in the media. One of the most prevalent messages – imparted with various degrees of subtlety across much of the UK's contemporary media, but with particular vigour in the conservative press – is that people commit crimes because 'they' are not like 'us'. Mediated explanations of crime are by no means monolithic, and their capacity for complexity and diversity should not be overlooked. Yet they do share a number of characteristics in common, one of the most important of which is that they tap into and reinforce cultural fears of 'otherness'.

Implicit in all the forms of intolerance and exclusion referred to in this article is the notion of a deviant 'other' – feared, loathed, or both – as the means to maintaining an idealised self. An understanding of 'otherness' helps to explain

why identities are often characterised by polarisation and by the discursive marking of inclusion and exclusion within oppositional classificatory systems: 'insiders' and 'outsiders'; 'us' and 'them'; men and women; black and white; 'normal' and 'deviant'. Drawing on psychosocial perspectives we analyse UK national press coverage in both tabloid (the *Sun*, the *Mirror*, and the *Daily Mail*) and broadsheet (the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, and the *Independent*) newspapers, both conservative and liberal, over a three-month period (February to April 2004). We present here a selective representation of a wider and ongoing analysis which illustrates, among other things, how images of otherness can be broadly conceptualised as reflecting a spectrum of deviance. In other words, mediated constructions of otherness exists on a continuum separated by two polar extremes ('stigmatised others' to 'absolute others'), which themselves are not fixed but expand and contract with levels of tolerance and concern. At one end of the spectrum, comprising 'ordinary' or mundane examples of crime, deviance and non-conformity, media representations reflect and reinforce a marked intolerance towards anyone or anything that transgresses an essentially conservative agenda. The travelling community, recent immigrants to the UK, single mothers and welfare 'cheats' are all examples of the 'stigmatised others' routinely chastised in press discourse. Which group is portrayed as the most deviant or troublesome at any particular time depends largely on media priorities, cultural trends and political currents, against which those in the media

firing line are essentially powerless. While they may appear to share little in common these groups are frequently portrayed individually and collectively as 'enemies within' who pose a tangible threat to the 'British way of life'.

At the other end of this spectrum of deviance are the 'exceptional' examples of crime, the most serious or unusual offences that seize the public imagination, either paralysing communities with fear, or eliciting levels of collective outcry which result in public protest and, in the extreme, vigilante action. Paedophilic murders, suicide bombings, acts of terrorism, children killing children, cannibalistic orgies, Internet-driven sex crimes may all be included here. Though there may be significant differences in the nature of both motivation and actual behaviour – for example, child sex offenders usually isolate specific individuals while religious fundamentalist terrorists may kill and maim indiscriminately – these deviants are feared and censured in equal measure. The point is that media representations of exceptional offences construct the 'outsider' status of perpetrators as unequivocal and incontestable. These deviants are the 'others' with whom we share the least in common ('we' being that loose collective of media consumers who are usually referred to euphemistically as the 'moral majority' or, more prosaically, by the *Sun* as 'white van man'). They are offenders with whom we actively establish and outwardly maintain the greatest distance, and toward whom we are most punitive and vindictive. They are portrayed in terms of their *absolute* otherness, their utter

detachment from the social, moral and cultural universe of ordinary, decent people – their pure and unadulterated evil.

What we have then is a sliding scale which extends between extremes of otherness, and which reflects and reinforces wider notions of ‘deviance and morality’, ‘inclusion and exclusion’. At one end of the spectrum are those who are *of* society but not *in* it: dole scroungers, asylum seekers, travellers, who are portrayed as social and economic parasites, contributing little or nothing to the economy, while relentlessly draining the state and hard-working tax payers of vital resources better deployed elsewhere. At the other end are those who are *in* society but not *of* it: paedophiles, child killers and religious fundamentalist terrorists, whose acts are portrayed as an affront against the sacrosanct values of virtue, decency and morality, apparently held by all respectable citizens.

The notion of a sliding scale of otherness played out in the media clearly owes a debt to the classic concepts of deviancy amplification and moral panic (see Wilkins, 1964; Cohen, 2002), theories of labelling and social constructionism (see Becker, 1963; Kitsuse and Spector, 1973), and more general explorations of crime and the media (for example, Cohen and Young, 1981; Kidd-Hewitt and Osborne, 1995). Our analysis is informed to varying degrees by all of these, and recent contributions from cultural criminology (Ferrell and Sanders, 1995; Presdee, 2000), but it seeks to refract existing research approaches through a lens which focuses on different aspects of the crime-media nexus. Specifically, we are

interested in the fluid interrelationships between categorisations of 'otherness', and in the processes through which the popular press may merge (often on the basis of scant evidence) previously distinct categories in order to create 'fresh' or 'recycled' deviant identities to be feared and reviled. In addition, we have embraced the recent revival of psychoanalytic theories within criminological discourse (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Maruna et al, 2004), in order to unravel the complex interaction between media production and consumption, on the one hand, and demonised groups on the other. This theoretical engagement has led us to the proposition that large sections of society may share more in common with certain categories of deviant than they care outwardly to acknowledge; a view that is paradoxically illustrated by the extreme negative response to these groups and individuals in the popular media. In the remainder of this brief and exploratory article, each of these issues is developed further.

Stigmatised and Absolute Others

The term moral panic, as Sparks (1992: 65) has noted, can be overused to the extent that we risk reducing this period of late modernity to some universal, endlessly cyclical state of 'panickyness'. It would be theoretically inaccurate to conceptualise media narratives chastising 'stigmatised others' for their relatively minor examples of non-conformity in these terms. Moral panics are commonly conceived as events which happen out of the blue and provoke an extreme

reaction which, in turn, is usually understood as an expression of the limits to the amount of diversity that society can tolerate. This proposition is in itself troublesome in a postmodern context in which diversity is often celebrated, and an ever-expanding mass media offers more counter definitions and rights to reply than at any time previously. Rather, those groups who occupy positions at the margins (by virtue of their socio-economic status or moderately deviant behaviour) are an ever-present source of concern for conservative commentators, and a constant blip on the moral radar of the popular press. Unlike paedophiles, terrorists and murderous children – the ‘absolute others’ who are portrayed as the evil monsters in our midst – lone mothers, their offspring, welfare recipients, asylum seekers, illegal immigrants and travellers are less feared than loathed. Far from being volatile (a key characteristic of moral panics; cf. Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Cohen, 2002), the underlying but pervasive contempt directed in media representations at these sections of society is striking in its consistency.

However, one important characteristic of the spectrum of deviance is that the groups and individuals who are positioned at various stages along the continuum from ‘least serious’ to ‘most serious’ are, to some extent, free-floating. The boundaries which separate different categories of deviance and dangerousness are not fixed and immutable, but fluid and permeable, and constantly change as a function of shifting cultural sensibilities and public concern. As a consequence, the deviant status of individuals, or categories of

individual, at the lower end of the spectrum may be *elevated* by a period of intense media attention which results in the whole group or category being viewed with renewed and intensified suspicion, derision and, at times, hostility. In short, while 'stigmatised others' at the lower end of the spectrum are generally portrayed as gradually but steadily corrosive of the fabric of society, rather than immediately and acutely threatening to the personal safety of its individual members, the press are quick to capitalise on any chance to merge these two themes. More than this, on the basis of an isolated incident of violent or otherwise serious criminality, the perceived deviance of whole categories of individual may be elevated considerably. That is, serious criminal incidents are frequently portrayed not as exceptional but as typical of a particular category of stigmatised other, and symptomatic of the wider problem of social decline and moral decrepitude. It is through this process of mediated elevation that 'stigmatised others' become 'absolute others'.

The Elevation of Deviance

Stories of stigmatised others which feature routinely in the conservative press help to sustain a level of subliminal contempt which, in certain circumstances, may translate into conscious fear. They retain a degree of newsworthiness because they form part of a wider, nostalgically reactionary narrative decrying the perceived increase in permissiveness and the decline of the social, the

collapse of discipline and the lack of respect for authority, the loss of better times and the wistful (if hopelessly naïve) call for a return to the good old days. The dangers of projecting a mythical past against a paranoid present have been developed elsewhere and need not be rehearsed again in detail here (Pearson, 1983; Sparks, 1995; Young, 1999). One of the concerns of this article is with those instances in which the deviance of such stigmatised groups is elevated to a new and altogether more insidious level.

Consider for example Susan Moore, who was recently given the title 'Britain's Laziest Woman' by the tabloid press. Describing her as a 'bone idle skiver' who 'hasn't done a day's work in her life' the 34-year-old from Burythorpe, North Yorkshire was subjected to a vitriolic attack for the 'crime' of 'pocketing £30,000 in benefits' by the *Mirror*, while the *Sun* felt moved to set up a 'Super Scrounger Hotline' to enable readers to track down 'wasters' like Susan (21st February 2004). The discovery that a woman had been living on £2,000 a year (or £40 a week) for 16 years might have prompted questions about the structures that deem this acceptable in one of the richest post-industrial nations in the world. But instead of emphasising the stresses and strains of making ends meet in a destabilised job market and a climate of aggressive capitalist consumerism, the narrative stressed the immorality of this woman's actions, and by implication, condemned the behaviour of all those who are long-term unemployed and welfare-dependent.

Moreover, this story serves to illustrate the processes through which media narratives may merge deviant profiles in order to form *über*-demons. The *Daily Telegraph* (24th February 2004) somewhat bizarrely links Susan Moore's benefit fraud to the current frenzy over Fundamentalist Islamic terrorists. In an editorial piece, Mark Steyn opines that the problem with the 'cradle-to-grave welfare society' is that it 'enfeebles the citizenry to such a degree' that no amount of welfare provision will ever be enough. He continues:

Happily, not all recipients waste their time on the dole: Muhammed Metin Kaplan set up his Islamist group, Caliphate State, while on welfare in Cologne; Ahmed Ressam, arrested in Washington State en route to blow up Los Angeles International Airport, hatched his plot while on welfare in Montreal; Zacarias Moussaoui, the '20th hijacker' currently on trial in America, became an Islamist radical while on welfare in London; Abu Hamza became Britain's most famous fire-breathing imam while on welfare in London; Abu Qatada, a leading al-Qaeda recruiter, became an Islamist bigshot while British taxpayers were giving him 10 times as much per week as Susan Moore. It was only when he was discovered to have £150,000 in his bank account that the Department for Work and Pensions turned off the spigot. If only the Susan Moore-ish super-spongers were as purposeful as the neo-Moorish super-spongers. I'm not saying every

benefit recipient is a terrorist welfare queen. I am saying that the best bet at saving the next generation of Susan Moores is if the US declares European welfare systems a national security threat.

The clear thrust of the message is that if Islamist radicals were kept busy with conventional pursuits, they would have less time to congregate in their evil cabals and plan the destruction of the civilised world. The somewhat absurd implication is that a 'soft touch' welfare system, overly protective and easy to manipulate, actively facilitates terrorist planning or, from a slightly different angle, that terrorist activities can somehow be averted by a hard day's work. The association with everyday benefit recipients, however tongue-in-cheek, reinforces the suggestion that there is something corrupting and corrosive about the provision of welfare and something fundamentally wrong, not only in social and economic terms, but also in moral terms, with those who receive it.

It is a typical stylistic device in the conservative press to focus almost exclusively on 'otherness' as a *cause* of deviant behaviour, often ignoring entirely other possible explanations. In this way, media narratives serve to elevate the deviance of individuals who arouse a lazy contempt among journalists, and who may be viewed as society's detritus by large segments of their readership, to a much higher level than they would otherwise attain. Another example of mediated deviance elevation concerns the conviction of Andrezej Kunowski for

the murder a 12-year-old girl in west London. Accounts made much of the fact that Kunowski was an illegal entrant into the UK, and presented the 'problems' of immigration and foreign nationality, rather than psychopathy, as key to understanding the attack. The *Daily Telegraph* (April 1st, 2004) protested that the case was an illustration of the 'complete breakdown of the immigration system'. The *Sun* (April 5th 2004) declared, 'Killer's Record Proves Immigration Shambles'. And the *Daily Mail* (April 2nd 2004) presented the murder as an example of 'what can happen when the immigration and asylum system breaks down'. In this instance, then, sections of the press succeeded in both appealing to public sentiments of revulsion at the sexually-motivated murder of a child, while at the same time promoting an agenda of xenophobia and intolerance toward immigrants living in Britain. This agenda was underlined by the discovery that Kunowski had even had 'life-saving surgery on the NHS and claimed benefits' (*Sun*, April 27th 2004). It is in the merging of such 'spoiled identities' (dole scrounger/terrorist, illegal immigrant/paedophile) that the elevation of deviance is achieved and that 'others' become subjects of fear as well as loathing.

Crime, Vindictiveness and Guilt

Expressive models of punitiveness such as that expressed in Steyn's *Daily Telegraph* editorial about 'dole cheat terrorists' (who are no doubt illegal immigrants to boot) resonate with the much-debated sense of ontological

insecurity engendered, it is argued, by the fragmentation of late modern societies, high levels of crime consciousness, and correspondingly high levels of fear of crime. Underpinned by the belief that late modernity is characterised by risk, recent debates have suggested that growing public punitiveness is symptomatic of the profound anxiety that besets contemporary life (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 1998, 2000). The scope of arguments around public attitudes to crime and punishment vary considerably – from locating the professional middle classes at the heart of the perceived ‘punitive turn’ (Garland, 2001) to accounts which seek to problematise the whole concept of ‘popular punitiveness’ (Young, 2003; Hancock, 2004). It is not our intention to cover this debate here, although one of the authors is developing related ideas elsewhere (Greer, forthcoming). Rather, we want to draw attention to an alternative and, in our view, helpful way of thinking about public punitiveness which feeds directly into our analysis of media representations of deviance and the construction of ‘stigmatised’ and ‘absolute’ others.

In a recent critique of public attitudes to offending, Maruna et al (2004) argue that what is absent from contemporary criminological enquiry is a ‘theory of the subject’ which clearly defines the point at which rational action tips over into irrational hatred and aggression. Maruna et al’s analysis explores the proposition that the crimes which attract the most punitive response are the crimes that people feel most likely to commit themselves. It draws subtly but

effectively on Melanie Klein's theory that human beings unconsciously separate parts of the self that are feared as bad and project them onto an outside object or person. This idea of splitting and projection (a process that might be summed up as 'scapegoating' in popular discourse) is articulated through the metaphor of the shadow; 'an unconscious part of the personality that the conscious ego rejects or ignores' (Maruna et al, 2004: 284). Self and shadow co-exist in perpetual conflict, jostling for supremacy in a classic struggle between good and evil. In a process of distillation and elucidation, Maruna et al explore this idea further, and extrapolate from extant psychoanalytic theory five explanations for public punitiveness which are reproduced below (their different ordering is merely intended to aid the flow of our argument):

- a sense of inferiority or shame at our own insignificance
- sadistic impulses to humiliate others
- guilt over our own role in the creation of the crime problem
- sublimated jealousy and admiration for the criminal's exploits
- guilt regarding our own sexual desires

While questions about the media do not feature in Maruna et al's analysis, it is interesting to consider the extent to which media tap into our collective unconscious and promulgate culturally reinforced fears of 'otherness' that are

underpinned by these five psychoanalytic explanations. To consider two of the explanations in brief; a *sense of inferiority or shame at our own insignificance* and a *sadistic desire to humiliate others* are arguably evident in much of the content found in the pages of our popular press. One illustration is the parasitic relationship that the press has with celebrities, the most salient example of which (since the death of Princess Diana) concerns the media-made phenomenon of David Beckham. Widely regarded as one of the most iconic figures of modern times the press has manufactured an image of 'Goldenballs' as a flaxen-haired demigod who lives the ultimate aspirational lifestyle with his pop star wife and cherubic sons. So significant is the England captain in contemporary culture that his alleged extra-marital affairs dominated popular press coverage throughout March and April 2004, eclipsing more 'weighty' stories of carnage in Iraq and the Government's plans for immigrants and asylum seekers. But like earlier press stories of this flawed hero - for example, when he was blamed for the England football team's premature exit from the 1998 World Cup in France - the sadistic impulse to humiliate Beckham (and his wife, who appears to have taken a disproportionate degree of blame for her husband's alleged indiscretions) is indicative of the extent to which those who work in the media news industries are drawn to stories that unite celebrity status with sexual deviance. Such tales provide a titillating juxtaposition of high life and low life for an audience who, it is assumed, lead conventional 'mid lives' (Barak, 1994).

Maruna et al's third explanation for public punitiveness, a collective sense of *guilt over our own role in the creation of the crime problem* is arguably manifested in the stigmatisation of single mothers, truanting children, welfare recipients and asylum seekers, already mentioned. Here psychoanalytic interpretations dovetail with expressive arguments to explain society's responses to those members whom it has effectively disenfranchised. Fears about economic insecurity and social disintegration collide with psychically held notions of otherness and are played out within social relations, thus reinforcing and reproducing divisions and inequalities (Minsky, 1996, 1998). Occasionally, such fears may become *sublimated into jealousy and admiration for the criminal's exploits*, Maruna et al's fourth explanation. This calls to mind Jock Young's (1971) suggestion that many of the people who think of themselves as 'moral' and who take exception to the immorality of deviants, actually have a grudging admiration - envy, even - for those who are seen to be 'breaking the rules'. According to Young, if a person lives by a strict code of conduct which forbids certain pleasures and involves the deferring of gratification in certain areas, it is hardly surprising that they will react strongly against those whom they see to be taking 'short cuts', as Susan Moore was reportedly doing by 'choosing' to live off state benefits rather than working. A sublimated feeling of envy on the part of journalists and their audiences may also partially explain the mixed media coverage accorded to Joyti De-Laurey, the PA convicted in April 2004 of stealing £4.5million from her bosses

at Goldman-Sachs. The *Daily Telegraph* (April 21st 2004) reported that the jury was told that the three 'victims' of this crime were wealthy 'to the point that is really the stuff of fairy tales' (unlike De-Laurey who was reportedly paid the relatively modest annual salary of £38,000), while the *Guardian's* (April 22nd 2004) headline read 'Give That Woman A Medal'. Other newspapers, in stark contrast, concentrated on De-Laurey's 'greed', 'jealousy' and 'crookedness'. Furthermore, like media narratives about female offenders more generally (and indeed *all* women), negative, potentially damaging stereotypes based on De-Laurey's appearance, sexuality and behaviour were commonplace (Jewkes, 2004). Even the tattoo she was reported to have on an intimate part of her body was taken as 'proof' of her 'difference' and questionable morality in the buttoned-up, conservative world of investment banking (*Mirror*, April 23rd 2004).

But it is perhaps Maruna et al's fifth explanation of public punitiveness – *guilt regarding our own sexual desires* – that is most difficult to extrapolate from 'acceptable', consensual definitions of crime and deviance. The problem of child sex offending presents a germane opportunity for reflection on this. Media representations of the perversity of adults who are sexually attracted to children and adolescents are routinely constructed in straightforward, unambiguous terms. Yet the reality is almost certainly more complex and more uncomfortable than such representations tend to suggest, and herein lies the paradox. Psychoanalytic explanations suggest that those whom we distance and demonise

may be the very people with whom (we fear) we share most in common. Media representations of child sex offenders are emphatic and unrestrained in their vitriol, and occasionally border on hysteria. Yet at the same time the sexualisation of children and the blurring of the boundaries between expressions of childhood and adult sexuality has reached unprecedented levels. One need only consider the Spring/Summer 2004 collections created by the fashion houses of Paris and Milan for a clear illustration of this trend. This year's style statements owe much to Nabokov's classic 1955 novel *Lolita*, the story of a middle-aged man's quest to seduce a twelve-year-old girl. Containing fantasy sequences and sexualised imagery of the pre-pubescent heroine, the book generated considerable controversy at the time of its publication and, for many, remains problematic today. Such sexualised images of adult-like children and childlike adults have become the fashion industry's stock in trade, though as one commentator notes, 'It took John Galliano to take this particular look to the extreme. This designer's models came down the catwalk in quite the most fluffy baby-doll dresses the world has ever seen. These were paired with bright white bobby socks... and matching silk Mary-Jane shoes' (Frankel, 2004: 14). The headline read, *Lolita Knocks our Socks off Again* (*Independent*, Review Section, 22nd April, 2004).

Silverman and Wilson (2002) point out that the vogue for small girls to dress as adult women and adult women to dress as small girls suggests that

children carry a broad appeal to many adults who are not paedophiles, and would frankly be offended by the suggestion. They go on to pose two questions that hint at the cultural discomfort provoked by this issue: why does our society collectively collude with the idea of 'stranger danger', when we are all too aware that most children will be abused by someone they know? And why is it that our society 'discovered' the paedophile at exactly the same time as this process of sexualising our children seemed to gain pace? (ibid: 182; Greer, 2003). Their suggestion that sexual attraction to children may not be the preserve of a few grubby, inadequate loners but is actually a widespread social phenomenon, was graphically illustrated by 'Operation Ore' launched in May 2002. Throughout the police investigation of 7,272 British subscribers to a Texas-based Internet portal linking to thousands of abusive images of children, the archetype of the grubby, socially inadequate, middle-aged man has been notable by its absence. Instead, those investigated have included high-profile celebrities, teachers, MPs, a prison governor, teenagers and women. The British subscribers represent a small fraction of the 390,000 individuals in 60 countries who subscribed to this one portal, but it has been suggested that as many as 250,000 Britons continue to use child pornography sites (Cullen, 2003; Jewkes, 2003).

The picture of adult-child sex crime suggested by Operation Ore contrasts strongly with the media coverage of eight-year-old Sarah Payne's abduction and murder by a convicted child sex offender in the summer of 2000 and the

subsequent 'direct action' taken by residents of the Paulsgrove estate in Portsmouth against suspected paedophiles and, in one notorious case of mistaken identity, a paediatrician. Though Paulsgrove is too often presented as typical, when it is in fact one of only a few such examples of community vigilantism (Hancock, 2004), it does represent an extreme expression of the punitive and vindictive sentiments toward child sex offenders which appear to be held by large sections of the public and are routinely expressed in media discourse. It might be suggested that the public vilification of child sex offenders is so intense because, on some level, there exists a sense of guilt at the inappropriateness of living in a society that not only tacitly sanctions, but actively commercialises and then aggressively markets the sexualisation of children. One of the best ways of defining what we are, as Ericson et al (1987) have observed, is by 'pointing to what we are not'. By demonising and homogenising child sex offenders – by claiming the greatest social distance, demonstrating the least tolerance and advocating the harshest penalties – society is perhaps seeking to mitigate a feeling of complicity, which may in turn translate into media-fuelled contempt, vindictiveness and, on occasion, community hostility and vigilante action.

Conclusion

Representations of crime, deviance and control illustrate the extent to which sections of the media harbour an apparent obsession with the demonisation of 'others' and serve as one of the primary sites of social inclusion and exclusion in late modernity. When examined in relation to the popular media, it is interesting to note the extent to which the five explanations of public punitiveness, drawn from psychoanalytic theory and discussed above, view the relationship between media and audience as one of collusion. To put it bluntly, crime is constructed and consumed in such a way as to permit the reader, viewer or listener to sidestep reality rather than confronting or 'owning up' to it. Although many of the *crimes célèbres* of recent years (especially those involving violent and/or sexual crimes against children) have been described as the unthinkable and unknowable, it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that they simply alert us to our collective unwillingness to think and to know (Jewkes, 2004). It is certainly the case that the crimes which adhere most clearly to journalistic perceptions of 'newsworthiness' elicit a deep cultural unease which we, as a society, can only confront if we detach ourselves from the perpetrator(s) emotionally, morally and physically. Through a process of alienation and demonisation we establish the 'otherness' of those who deviate and (re)assert our own innocence and normality (Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001). Yet the repulsion we express (not least through the medium of mass communications) frequently denies the fact that

those who commit crimes are not 'others'. They are 'us', and are of our making. Furthermore, media representations of the least powerful sections of society not only perpetuate psychic notions of otherness, but frequently merge individuals from both ends of the spectrum of deviant imaginaries, lumping together diverse identities and circumventing traditional notions of folk devilry in favour of homogenised groups of freaks, perverts and monsters. Consequently, while the 'absolute other' must have committed a crime or crimes so heinous that their complete dislocation from the rest of society seems natural, even necessary, the 'stigmatised other' need only fail to conform to cultural and economic norms in order to attract the scrutiny and criticism of the media. Frequently, then, it is the truly powerless, rather than the truly evil, who are demonised and stigmatised in the popular media.

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