

Psychopaths in media

Psychology, Psychotherapy



working outline Topic: Psychopaths and the legitimacy of their portrayal in film and media. Specific purpose: To inform the audience of the inaccuracy of the portrayals of certain mental illnesses. Thesis: Today's socializing agent is the media, distortion of accuracy in its portrayal leads to misconceptions and misunderstandings which hinders the cultural growth and knowledge of society. 1. Introduction: a. There are at least two million psychopaths in North America at any given moment. b. This is a problem that every single person comes into contact with at least once. c. Although many psychopaths are criminals, many more use charm and manipulation to take advantage of the people around them. d. They manipulate people through body language, fast-talking, wit and charm. In books and movies we find psychopathy to be quite a common theme, however these representations are often exaggerated or completely inaccurate. e. Cultures and societies pass on to their members knowledge of the world. Transition : Today's socializing agent is the media, distortion of accuracy in its portrayal leads to misconceptions and misunderstandings which hinders the cultural growth and knowledge of society. 1. Body: a. There are certain prominent characteristics observed in those mentally productive individuals. b. In the case of a psychopath, activity (daily routine) is borne fully by the force of their personality and as their moods rise and fall, so does their productivity. c. These are called " biological fluctuations". Lara 2 d. Many of these defy detection in the life of the average person because their mechanical routine work discloses little of their actual personality 2. Body: a. Psychopath literally means mental illness which causes the confusion that psychopaths are disoriented or out of touch with reality as seen in other mental illnesses. b. What differentiates

psychopaths from the mentally ill is that every action is one of choice. c. Although strongly led by impulse, psychopaths are fully aware of their actions. d. Having found psychopaths not to be ill, what are they? e. Hervey Cleckley, author of *The Mask of Sanity*, and creator of "Cleckley's Checklist", a method used for diagnosing psychopathy, states: "A psychopathic personality shows not a disorder of personality but rather a defect of personality, together with a set of defenses evolved around that defect". (Cleckley 261) f. These defects are said to create a new personality altogether, currently known as Antisocial Personality Disorder; It differs from an abnormal personality when one knowingly causes other people to suffer because of his or her personality. g. A personality in itself is known as a particular constellation of basic traits in a variety of structural models. h. The specific configuration of traits known to psychopathy according to an expert generated Five-Factor Model (FFM) psychopathy prototype study are: impulsiveness, assertiveness, excitement seeking, competence and action based, also dominant, forceful and socially ascendant. 3. Body: a. Origins of psychopathy are still unknown, but many theories are speculated. Lara 3 b. One states that the impulsiveness and isolated nature of the psychopath as well as lack of empathy or emotion may be the result of a prolonged break in the relationship with the mother in the first year of life (Giora 139) c. Another speculation is that psychopathy is characterized by a severely underdeveloped set of inhibitions, possibly having physiological basis. d. That along with having an innate deficit in their ability to learn from mistakes makes punishment ineffective. e. It is suspected that brain damage to the hypothalamus and parental rejection may be responsible, meaning

psychopaths need more stimulation to feel emotion. f. In "Gough's Role Taking Theory", (S. 4 N. 4) Gough drew on the interactionist perspective of sociology in which self contempt is the capacity to look on oneself as an object and emerge as the product of social interaction and communication. g. Gough would have his patients switch roles with each other, and in doing so it creates different conceptions of "ME", and the ability to understand the "Others" point of view — a step towards empathy. 4. Body: a. Psychopathy is often confused with Sociopathy. b. Although they are very similar, there are subtle differences. c. In film and literature however, they are usually confused since psychopathy does not have a clear forensic diagnosis, many believe it is linked to criminality. d. It has less to do with overt criminality but rather a desire to satisfy insatiable internal needs. e. The media, in misinterpreting these differences is known to portray fictional serial killers as "Psychopaths" making them intelligent, resourceful, with jobs and responsibilities. f. They are simultaneously shown to have obsessions, delusions and even hallucinations. Lara 4 g. At the climax of the book or film, the same individuals are shown to have delusional disorganized tendencies unlike before. h. Thrillers and horror movies specifically deal with psychopaths characterized by violence and familiarity of their environment, ex. The movies Halloween and Nightmare on Elm Street. i. In many thrillers fake psychiatrists deem the psychopaths as monsters, inhuman or less than human. j. Media is frequently criticized on its portrayal of mental illnesses for being unrealistic, often due to the rarity of the condition being portrayed or how probable the actions of the protagonist. k. Television and movie producers view research as a burden which may hinder the process of

making a watchable TV drama. l. Producers try to avoid public education believing audiences want to be entertained not lectured. m. Writers editors and directors present mentally ill people as physically different, even if doing so does not match their own actual experiences. Ex. One Flew Over The Cuckoos Nest, producers had a difficult time finding actors with physical features unusual enough to depict mental illness. n. Actual mental patients from Oregon state hospital were rejected from walk on roles due to their normal appearance. o. Those with mental illness are, if the tv image is to be believed, a distinct class of people characterized primarily if not exclusively by the illness they suffer. p. Producers of the soap opera Brookside, argued that they don't run potentially controversial story lines specifically to increase ratings. " They do not want to thrust issues down the viewers throat, only entertain" (Philo 25) However they clarify that Lara 5 depicting mental illness is only TV worthy when patients are in crisis or rising towards it. q. The healing process is not interesting enough for TV audiences. 5.

Body: a. The media is aware of the faulty depictions it gives. b. Audiences should know that what they are viewing is fictional and therefore producers and writers feel that any misinterpretations or false expectations that may come from any film or media is wholly the viewers fault. c. In terms of catching true mental illness on camera, the very presence of media crews in a psychiatric institution can influence the behavior of patients, particularly with the severely disturbed, whom are more often the subject of the cameras. d. One producer said the camera " fed to their illness" (Philo 25) e. Misconceptions formed by inaccuracy in media give people the power to formulate wrong ideas about mental patients, which can lead to the

worsening of said patients illness. f. The resulting misunderstandings of these illnesses have other significant practical consequences, these may lead to confusion or false expectations and conflicts of the loved ones of someone who has been diagnosed with an idealized illness portrayed in media. g. Those with these illnesses and their loved ones, find painful the over exaggeration of certain conditions and the careless exploitative use of psychiatric terms, saying it creates a negative view of those suffering from mental illness.

6. Conclusion:

a. These false depictions bring with them a negative connotation. b. General public fears those mentally ill, seeing them as unstable, hence the derogatory slang “ crazy” or “ psycho”. c. This leads many people to believe that psychopathy is directly linked to criminality even though this is untrue. d. Criminal careers are a result of emotional conflict. e. Unlike the criminal, the psychopath has a lack of emotional responsiveness and seldom takes much advantage of what he gains and almost never works consistently in crime or anything else to achieve a permanent position of power or wealth.

Lara 7 Works Cited

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