

Youth Moral Panic By Mass Media

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Media Representation and the Construction of Youth Deviance

The media use of negative images and narrations has depicted the youth as criminals and deviants of law and order. It leads to the question of whether the characterized mass media young people's crime ought to be seen as a [moral panic](#) or crisis. As a result, the young, especially in the UK, are carrying a social and peculiar revealing of the nature of the media in promoting societal discourse to sensationalize and demonize the prevalence of technology as a tool to disrupt the moral order in a society.

The media has then developed a tendency to represent the youth in a bad picture, which has created a stir in society and has significantly gained public attention. In this paper, I will present several case scenarios to showcase the media and youth crime controversy. From the time that youth crime was defined as juvenile delinquency, the media has taken the advantage to create moral panic within the society, using specific offenses as a catalyst to drive the agenda.

Stanley Cohen developed a definition of moral panic in 1972 after witnessing the skewed coverage of media regarding Rockers and Rods, the UK, which took place in the 1960s. The author has described moral panic as a "condition or group of persons who are perceived as a risk to the society upon sensationalizing through media to disrupt the normalcy of values and interests" (Bawdon). Instances of moral panics are taken to prompt a discourse in society. In addition, the incident often results in heated arguments and creates tension in society, which becomes very difficult as it is viewed as a taboo (Greer and Reiner).

Mass Communication and the Production of Moral Panic

Society, especially in the present times, depends on numerous media avenues for news feeds and information. The available media platforms that are predominant in the UK include online content, blogs, radio, newspapers, magazines, websites, and broadcast news channels. Each of the platforms has an exclusive mandate with a portion of readers it attracts to spread information. What is given to society in the form of media is often taken seriously and is true even with a lack of reliable sources. It is all in their hands to convey the message they deem right to get the attention of the readers. As a result, it has a great impact on creating a public perception, therefore media has the power to

influence the emotions and opinions of the public regarding a particular thought-to-be controversial. The prevalence of moral panic and the developing perception of deviant youth in modern society is a result of drastic changes in the modern world brought about by technology and cultural diversity. A moral panic occurs when a society finds it challenging to adapt to values and principles that tend to defy cultural normalcy. According to Bawdon (2009), change acceptance becomes difficult because society feels like it is losing control of the youth. For a long, the media has focused on sensationalizing society by depicting them to be following a path of social discourse, which creates a perception of the youth as developing criminal tendencies.

Upon analysis of the literature, Greer and Reiner have demonstrated the discourse with a focus on creating a conversation about the daily youth living in the present age. The news media and the political rhetoric have allowed the line to be drawn in regard to the media sensitization discourse and the youth (victim) (Barker).

Drawing reference from a recent study conducted by Women in Journalism (Wij) there is a direct correlation established on qualitative analysis of the depiction of the teenage boys whose report found its way to the British newspaper (2008-2009). Alongside the media analysis, 1000 teenage boys were interviewed about their perceptions of the way their age group is portrayed in the media. The aim of this research was to uncover why teenage boys have been branded as toxic urban menaces and explore the impact this has on the attitudes of teenage boys in the UK.

Social Inequality, Youth Identity, and Symbolic Threats

The media rhetoric in regard to developing the prevalent moral panic has been interlinked with their lifestyle, leading to discourse among the youths. The identified determinant indicators are hoodies, youth construction, fear, and social inequality.

To cite an example to complement the analysis is the interplay between the media and youth discourse by the hoodies label. It has become a topic of discussion in daily discussion, showing concern in the social evidence enough to show the media's hegemonic power over the construction of moral panic and youth discourse. Drawing from previous studies, the findings have continued to enlighten the sensationalized approach chosen by the media to portray youth as criminals, sparking a political concern to evoke a moral panic (Bartie 385-408). Surprisingly, within the participant discourse, the word, "street" was frequently combined with "hoodie" in interpretive repertoires suggesting that constructions are not submissive to media influences but dominated by personal experiences. Yet, due to the media labelling of „hoodie“, it is deduced that the media plays a role in consolidating the construction.

The media also has the opportunity to depict the youth in a positive way, but instead, they have taken the path of evoking anger and fear in society, which is directed at the youth. In most cases, the news

that makes it to the media houses and does rounds on social media platforms is of youths committing crimes within their neighbourhood. A good example to showcase the tendency of the media's attitude towards the youth is the Stephen Lawrence case of 1993. The story was published in the Daily Mail newspaper, which labelled all five suspects as criminals, qualifying the charge of murder. In fact, the paper cover termed them as "murderers". The media house went forward to call for anyone with doubts to sue them in a court of law. Daily Mail had an eye-catching headline that read "Murderers" thus accusing the men of killing, it quoted "If we are wrong, let them sue us" (Stone). As a result, it provoked large criticism in the public arena with different reactions. A huge section of the public went ahead and praised the newspaper for taking charge of stepping for the law, believing that the courts had failed to deliver justice and convict the villain. In other reactions, it was termed a "trial by media" (Young).

A major obstacle is determining the actual losses incurred in particular cases to ensure effective restoration. Seeking sufficient resources to cater to the losses is quite a challenge for the program. In addition, the integration of the shaming approach can be a threat to the course as offenders could feel humiliated and come together and form subcultures with anger towards society. Also, the shamed offenders could view the approach as a way of stigmatizing a threat to restorative justice programs. Policymakers with insights and recommendations on the programs display the greatest promise of remedying material and psychosocial conditions.

Crime Reporting and the Consequences of Criminalizing Youth

The increasing tendency of the media to represent the youth as criminals is suspected of rallying society against the group. The media has put so much focus on showcasing and reporting violent crimes committed by youthful criminals defined as juvenile offenders. Even in justification, the media is on duty to inform the public and remind them of the increasing number of youths committing crimes (Civile and Obhi p.62). The establishment of integrated platforms of social service delivery targeting criminal elements to improve human capital development is no easy task. It requires integrative social policy change in the media.

Another good example of the catchy sensationalized stories by the media is the murder case of Ben Kinsella, a teenager. Through the Daily Mail paper, a catchy headline, "T.V stars brother stabbed to death as he begged for help", drew public attention just because of the pick of words. The use of the phrases TV star and "begged for help" evoked compassion and remorse among the readers. Media influence on society is also denoted by the Evening Standard website, which reported the same story with a different headline titled "Guilty: Animals who killed Ben Kinsella". Just by reading the title, attention is drawn to reading the content, and the use of youth images creates a perception of the animosity among the youth, therefore, influencing public opinion regarding the murder.

The dirt and demonization directed to the youth by the media are well illustrated through the Stephen

Lawrence case. It comes to show the impact media has on creating a societal perception and their contribution to spreading moral panic. One thing is certain: the lack of media will lead to only a portion of people being influenced to believe moral panic. The case of Stephen Lawrence is the usual characterization of modern British society with the tendency to ignore that such cases are rare and extreme, however, in equal measure they are unique. The sensitization of youth crime cases by the media draws much attention from the public, prompting a reaction that has created moral panic in the UK. The modern youth, especially in the UK, are carrying a social and peculiar burden due to the media promoting societal discourse to sensationalize and demonize the prevalence of technology as a tool to disrupt the moral order in a society.

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