Dissertation Defense

Reading Between the Lines: An Intersectional Media Analysis of Female Sex Offenders in Florida Newspapers

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Abstract:
The media is one of the furthest reaching social institutions of our society. It is a source of white patriarchal ideologies and a vehicle through which they are communicated. Female sex offenders represent a nexus of prescribed social and legal violations. This dissertation examines the reinforcement of patriarchal ideas in media coverage of female sex offenders by posing the question: how are female sex offenders portrayed in the media? Specifically, how are those portrayals racialized? Using an intersectional lens, this study employs a qualitative content analysis to examine the top five circulating newspapers in Florida and their coverage of female teachers who have been convicted of having sex with adolescent male students. The findings reveal themes of Blameworthiness & Accountability, Bourgeois Standards of Womanhood, and Threat & Dangerousness. These findings reveal that through the inclusion or exclusion of certain discourse about female sex offenders, newspapers perpetuate racialized and gendered expectations of women, generally, and implicitly reinforce controlling images of women of Color.