

1. Ideology or Insanity? Media Portrayal of Ted Kaczynski and Tim McVeigh

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Standing at the intersection of mass media and the medicalization of deviance, this research explored mainstream media coverage of two convicted murderers, Timothy McVeigh and Ted Kaczynski. Were their criminal actions explained as emanating from psychological abnormality and mental illness or political and ideological motivation? Qualitative analysis indicates that McVeigh's crimes were more frequently attributed to political and ideological motivation, despite compelling reasons to at least raise the possibility that his actions may have been caused by psychological abnormality, if not mental illness. His crimes were not defined as emanating from psychological abnormality and mental illness. Kaczynski's crimes, on the other hand, were more frequently attributed to psychological abnormality and mental illness; he was not portrayed as a politically or ideologically motivated actor, despite compelling reasons to define him as such. McVeigh acted 'in the service of ideology', whereas Kaczynski's actions were the result of individual psychological abnormality: he acted in the service of 'an inner psychological need' (Johnston, 1995). The media served a social control function in defining him as crazy, removing his critique of industrial society from serious intellectual and public consideration.