

Portraying Serial Killers through Reels: A Critical Analysis of Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile (2019)

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ABSTRACT

Human beings have long known to share a fascination with out-of-the-ordinary events. Crimes, murders, serial killers are a macabre phenomenon that is readily used by TV and film industries to capitalize on. Due to such general interest of the public, films, and shows depicting murder, crimes, etc. are amongst the most popular genres today. These sensitive topics are readily used by media to attract and hold their audience. Public perceptions about serial killers do not match with real-life scenarios. They are myths rather than facts. Media plays the biggest role in conveying the idea of serial homicide to the public. Often it turns out to be just exaggerations made for the attention of the audience. This paper examines the fault the director Joe Berlinger made in *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019) while representing the notorious Ted Bundy.

KEY WORDS: Serial killers, fantasy, reality, killings, necrophilia.

INTRODUCTION

'Serial killers' is a phenomenon that is fascinating and human beings share the excitement and extra interest in such topics. Hence it has become the reason for the rising trend of this concept in movies and TV series.

The stories of real serial killers are made into different genres. Many types of documentaries, narratives, clips, articles, and movies hit the box office with tremendous effect.

Theodore Robert Bundy, more commonly known as Ted Bundy was an American serial killer. He was one of the most notorious criminals of the late 20th century. He was a 1970s serial murderer, rapist, and necrophiliac. After so many denials he confessed that he murdered 30 women. His true victim total is unknown and investigators believe it is higher.

Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile is a 2019 biography film released on Netflix. The film is directed by Joe Berlinger based on the memories of Bundy's former girlfriend Elizabeth Kendall.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the paper is to point out the mistakes director Joe Berlinger made in handling this sensitive content of the world-famous serial killer Ted Bundy. The fictional elements added often tend to create a negative cultural impact. And somewhere Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile (2019) turns out to have its negative impacts on the audience.

ANALYSIS

The film begins with the quote of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe 'Few people have the imagination for reality'. The director meant that the reality of a certain situation is harder to grasp sometimes than some fantastical notion indicating Ted's family and friends likely believed the fantasy/ coincidence rather than the harsh reality. The serial killer Ted Bundy is played by Zac Efron, one of the most charming actors of the Hollywood industry. The biggest criticism against the movie was the heartthrob of America Zac Efron playing the role of the notorious criminal. The actor portraying Zac influenced the fans to fantasize about Ted Bundy. The scenes of the film portray Ted as a fatherly figure and hero who tries to convince his girlfriend and jury about his innocence.

The film on one side captures the charming behavior of Ted Bundy. The first scene shows Ted falling in love, be a perfect gentleman to Elizabeth Kendall spends time with Molly Kendall and, be a caring father for her. In real life, Ted maintained this persona among his peers. But on the other hand, the film does not mention his traumatic childhood nor feature any of the victim's story. None of the victim's struggles, their

family's pain, the survivor's stories have been included in the film. This exclusion made the story revolve around Ted being the central hero of the whole movie.

The movie just shows a 15-second scene in the end where Ted smashes the head of a victim with a crowbar. For a movie about a man who admitted to having killed 30 people and must have done so much more, this 15-second scene does not fit enough to portray his evil side. The Director whereas explains that such descriptions were purposefully avoided to bring the film from Elizabeth's point of view. The audience is given knowledge about only what Elizabeth knew. They are made to choose from their faith and reality.

Ted Bundy is portrayed in the movie to have a single true relationship alone. But in reality, he had many other girlfriends whom he used for money, sexual content, and to fit onto the upper-class description. The movie gives the look of Ted who deeply loves his girlfriend whereas he was not really in a fully committed relationship. Such a description of Ted often makes the audience feel sympathetic towards Ted's depression and his failed attempts to convince his girlfriend. The monster that hid inside the love he showed for Kendall is purposefully hidden by the director of the film.

The film does not go onto the description where Carol DaRonch identifies Ted from a line. It was Carol who helped the cops to connect the link to the murders. But she's not given importance in the film and her part of the story is not told.

Another failure of the film was that it failed to exhibit the FBI agents and the police officers' effort to find the murderer. The cops were left with no clues and it was after years of struggle that they found Ted and gave him the sentence to death. None of their real struggles or efforts were shown except someone or two scenes. The crime investigation and processing were shown in the movie as a quick process whereas all the crime procedures took a very long time to come into action. The film skips the actual happenings of crime-related procedures. This defied the audience's knowledge about the happenings under the law. The film goes on less detail about shreds of evidence, murders, charges, and punishments.

Bundy's two escapes from the prison one from the 2nd floor of the courthouse library and the other from the ceiling of Colorado jail with help from Carole Ann Boone were covered in the film. The film also shows the relationship that he makes with his wife Carole Ann Boone. The film shows Ted's immense love for

Elizabeth and his sparing her life. But in real life, Ted has attempted to kill Kendall by blocking the chimney hole so that she would die due to the smoke.

The movie took a substantial amount of dialogue from real-life Extremely Wicked gives the subversion of Ted that humanizes him under the lens of Elizabeth Kendall. The movie has its elements of myths and elements of fiction and it decides the audience's perception. But the life of a notorious serial killer is not preferable to be fictionalized. The media industry leaves out the victim's pain, emotion, tragedy and instead romanticizes the central hero Ted Bundy. It is unfair to the victims, disrespectful to their soul, unfair towards future rapes and abuse, to normalize or brush off this sort of behavior to sell tickets at the box office.

Bundy got more than the fame he deserved from his merciless evil character whereas the victims turned out to be a painful memory. None of the victim's emotions nor their pain or her sufferings were included. Not even the tears of the family members who lost their beloved were mentioned. The film just protagonised Ted Bundy.

The director explained the reason for giving Ted such good ideals. He wanted to convey that the serial killer was not an extraordinary guy. He could be the guy next door. Thinking from this point of view, it's the role of the audience to perceive reality in the way it is meant to be perceived. The film is a message to the people when excluding all other negative aspects of it.

CONCLUSION

The media has the power to decide and alter public perceptions. Over a decade, the popularity of serial killer movies has had its rise. It has attracted a wide audience and still, the box-office hits well with these reels. But this media presents serial killers in a biased sensationalized way. It gives minimal reference to the probable scientific theories of causation. It does not disseminate scientific information about the phenomenon to the public. The media must educate the public on the reality of serial killers rather than sensationalize them as inconceivable monsters. Movies and clips related to the killers are a means by which the public gets to know about the killer and the killing. But here media puts the tag of a 'family man'. The positive elements alongside the crime tend to humanize the killer and his killings.

Serial killers are rare, yet they are present in society. Instead of humanizing the concept people must realize that there is a fault in the person's behavior. People need clarification that such people are monsters and that they are hidden in society. It is the people who must recognize the truth. They must not be swayed by the exaggerations nor fall prey to the media's exaggerations. It is people who should verify and decide on their opinion. Because media is not always the truth. The reality is different.

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