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CTZN 110-53

14th November 2019

Monster v. Mercy Panel Notes for the Influence of Media on Gypsy Rose Blanchard

I. Summary of the Blanchards' Story

- A. Dee Dee claimed that Gypsy had numerous medical conditions when really she didn't have them. Dee Dee began this life of lies when Gypsy was three months old. By the time she was a teenager, Gypsy had no teeth, was in a wheelchair, was "paralyzed" from the waist down from MS, had a feeding tube, was diagnosed with leukemia and asthma, and labeled as mentally disabled. However, Gypsy did not actually have any of these disorders but because she was on so many various medications to treat them, this actually did make her physically sick because her body was trying to fight off the unnecessary drugs. Thus, this resulted in long-term overstimulation of her immune system and the development of what presented itself as the previously mentioned medical disorders. Dee Dee conned their entire community, as well as society in general, into believing their pity story so that they could receive immense amounts of charity. This included a free Habitat for Humanity home, food bank benefits, celebrity donations, Make-A-Wish Foundation trips, etc.
- B. When Gypsy became a teenager, she found a man named Nick Godejohn online and began virtually dating him. Their relationship included lots of sexual BDSM

and role-play. Nick was always the one in control of the relationship with Gypsy following his lead since she didn't know any better. Shortly into their relationship, they began meeting in person and Gypsy snuck around her mother's eagle eye to be with him. Eventually, Gypsy trusted Nick enough to tell him that she knew she wasn't sick and that she could even walk. Soon, Nick began repeatedly telling Gypsy that she should kill her mother in order to get away from her. Gypsy had unsuccessfully attempted to run away before, but her mother always found her and then physically abused her afterward.

C. Finally, Nick convinced Gypsy to devise a plan to murder Dee Dee. Nick was the one who wanted to commit the act of murder and he also stated that he wanted to rape her after she was dead. Gypsy hid in her bathroom while Nick stabbed Dee Dee to death and afterward Nick raped Gypsy. The two ran away together and sought refuge at Nick's family's house where they planned to start new lives together. Nick also mailed the murder weapon to his house. When Dee Dee's body was discovered, the police immediately searched for Gypsy thinking that she had also been killed or kidnapped. However, when they found Gypsy at Nick's house, they immediately took them into questioning and, eventually, Gypsy broke down in interrogation. Both Gypsy and Nick pleaded guilty to the murder of Dee Dee, with Nick admitting to actually committing the murder and Gypsy admitted that she was a full accomplice. In 2016, Gypsy was given a 10-year sentence for the second-degree murder of her mother. Nick Godejohn was sentenced to life in prison for first-degree murder.

II. First Presentation Argument Summary

A. **Premise 1:** Dee Dee raised Gypsy in an environment which offered her little to no autonomy or trust.

1. All of the medical conditions that Dee Dee claimed Gypsy had been ones that required Dee Dee to make decisions on Gypsy's behalf.
2. Dee Dee established her dominance over Gypsy through physical contact both in public and in private at home.
3. Gypsy was made, not born, to be who she is, which is submissive.

B. **Premise 2:** Gypsy had a bad relationship with her mother which set a poor foundation for how she believed her romantic relationship with Nick was supposed to work.

1. Gypsy was used to Dee Dee controlling everything in her life.
2. Nick had a "wannabe alpha-male" attitude due to being treated inferiorly in his life because of his own disabilities.
3. Nick was obsessed with having sexual control.

C. **Premise 3:** Nick firmly believed he had to protect Gypsy from anything and anyone.

1. Gypsy had confided in Nick about the abuse she was experiencing at home from Dee Dee and about her doubts about whether she was truly sick.
2. Nick was the first one to suggest that they could kill Dee Dee.

3. Gypsy created most of the operations for plan because she was the only one who knew everything about Dee Dee and their lives. However, Nick was in charge of the execution of the plan.
4. Nick is the one who physically murdered Dee Dee.
5. Nick moved Gypsy to his home.

D. **Conclusion:** Without Nick, Gypsy never would have conspired to murder Dee Dee.

1. Gypsy needed someone to guide her through everything she did because that's how she was raised.

III. Media Lens of Interest

A. Personally, I find the influence that the media has had on Gypsy's and society's perception interesting because, even before the murder, the Blanchard family had been very well-known in their community, even with celebrities. Once it was discovered that Gypsy and her boyfriend, Nick, were the murderers of Dee Dee, everyone was confused by this because, to them, Gypsy had always been the undeserving victim of many medical conditions and who was unconditionally loved by her mother. Furthermore, when it became known that Gypsy was a victim of Munchausen by Proxy, a rare and extreme form of child abuse by a caregiver, this gave the people who were following the case another reason to rationalize the murder of Dee Dee and protect Gypsy.

IV. Second Presentation Argument

A. **Premise 1:** The media treated this case as “high-profile” and romanticized the severity of Dee Dee’s murder through the taboo surrounding Munchausen by Proxy victimhood.

1. **Rationales:** Murder cases are usually high-profile no matter what, but unique ones specifically grab the attention of the media and society because of the thrill of their difference. The murder of Dee Dee was definitely unique because the Blanchard family was already somewhat famous, but for all of the truth surrounding their lives to be labeled as lies, it was interesting for society to understand what happened. In the Springfield News-Leader, the online newspaper for the town where the Blanchards lived, it was said that “They may not always adhere to the highest standards of journalism and documentary storytelling. But they’ll keep on coming for a good long while, partly due to Gypsy’s relationship to the media and partly due to the public’s desire for true crime stories.” This statement proves that even the media themselves recognize that this story is fascinating and they’re going to use this to their advantage to exploit the interests of the public. However, despite the fact that Gypsy was charged with the murder of her mother less than 24 hours after Dee Dee’s body was discovered, once it became known that Gypsy was a victim of Munchausen, it gave society a sense of comfort to be able to rationalize such a “sweet” and “innocent” girl’s reason for murdering her mother. Additionally, Gypsy was raised by her mother to seek attention

from others in order to gain sympathy for her pity as well as to ask for help. So, since the media continues to constantly profile Gypsy in a positive light, she feels as though she is living up to the lifestyle her mother taught her. Marc Feldman, a psychiatrist who studies victims of factitious disorders, also saw this behavior in Gypsy and stated, "It's classic attention-seeking, which she probably learned from Dee Dee. I don't know her motive, but I think some of it has to be manipulation." In the eyes of the law, she deserved punishment for the murder even though she was a sympathetic character. However, in the eyes of society, she is just a young girl who rescued herself anyway that she could as soon as she had the opportunity.

- B. **Premise 2:** The media companies that are involved with this case are mostly celebrity news outlets, such as Dr. Phil, which normalizes Gypsy's actions and leads followers to believe that she is a normal person just like anyone else who has been featured by these media companies.
1. **Rationales:** This promotes Gypsy's story being seen through a social, gossip lens instead of as a criminal and immoral case. She is even defined as a "true crime sensation" by E-News and has a well-known episode with Dr. Phil. By being associated with these companies, it creates the idea that if Gypsy is only a victim and not also a daughter who orchestrated the murder of her mother. Her victimhood throughout her entire life, first for being so medically disabled and now by being abused through

Munchausen, has essentially excused her actions regardless of the fact that they were still unethical. This trivialization of her crimes by the media reinforces the warped mentality that Gypsy is supposed to live by seeking public attention for her victimhood, just like what her mother raised her to believe. In essence, the media is acting as though the only reason Gypsy was given her criminal sentence is that the law demands that a predetermined punishment be given when a certain crime is committed. The media is leading society and Gypsy to believe that she simply has to wait out her sentence, but she doesn't necessarily deserve to be in prison. This justifies Gypsy's actions and allows her to think of herself as innocent despite the fact that she pleaded guilty.

C. **Premise 3:** The media continues to stay updated with Gypsy's personal life and publish romantic stories about her.

1. **Rationales:** As stated previously, because these media companies are still following her in a positive light, this allows Gypsy to feel justification for her actions as well as believe that she has been forgiven by the world. Her "celebrity darling," treatment has even warranted her to receive fan mail along with the privilege to reply to them. In early 2017, a young man named Ken wrote to Gypsy in response to seeing her TV show *The Act* on Hulu. Roughly a year and a half after being consistent, romantic pen-pals, Gypsy and Ken finally met in person and their meeting was covered and announced by E-News. It was also announced later on by Gypsy's family

that the two are now engaged and are planning on being married in prison in January. Personally, I find this incredibly unnerving because this fan contacted Gypsy to tell her that he idolized her for her crimes, and now, Gypsy is claiming to be in love with him even though he enjoys the fact that she is a murderer. To me, this just sounds like another possible Nick Godejohn situation. Additionally, E-News, which is one of the most popular celebrity news outlets in the United States, seems to have exclusive coverage of Gypsy's romantic life and they even posted a picture on their Instagram as an engagement announcement for Gypsy and Ken.

D. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, the media romanticizes and normalizes Gypsy Rose Blanchard's actions and criminal sentence, therefore leading Gypsy herself to believe that she was not as morally responsible for the murder of her mother. Therefore, Gypsy is a monster who is able to manipulate those around her and is not truly facing the punishment she deserves for taking away the life of another."