



Race, Gender, and Mental Illness in the Criminal Justice System (Criminal Justice: Recent Scholarship)

Melissa Thompson

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Thompson analyzes the process through which criminal responsibility is constructed and reproduced on the basis of race and gender. While feminist literature points to constructions of female offenders as “mad” and male offenders as “bad,” overall the results of this research do not support this perspective. Instead, major findings include strong and consistent evidence that African American defendants are less likely to receive psychiatric evaluations to determine mental status at the time of the offense. This implies that criminal justice officials have racial perceptions about the causes of crime; consequently, African American defendants may be portrayed as “normal” criminals who are held to a different level of responsibility than non-African Americans.

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