



Looking for Ashley: e-reading What the Smith Case Reveals about the Governance of Girls, Mothers and Families in Canada

Rebecca Jaremko Bromwich

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The 2007 death by self-induced strangulation in prison of nineteen year old inmate Ashley Smith drew a great deal of public attention. The case gave rise to a shocking verdict of homicide in the 2013 inquest into the cause of her death. In this book, I inquire into questions about of what social problem or phenomenon Ashley Smith is a “case,” and what governmental work is done by prevalent constructions of her as an exemplar. This book performs a critical discourse analysis of figures of Ashley Smith that emerge in her case, looking at those representations as technologies of governance. It argues that the Smith case is read most accurately not as an isolated system failure but an extreme result of routine, everyday brutality, of a society and bureaucracies’ gradual necropolitical successes. It critically analyzes how representations of Ashley in the case leave intact, and even reinforce, logics and systems governing gender, motherhood, security, risk, race thinking and exclusion, in power and knowledge that make it predictable for similar deaths in prison to recur. It argues that, in the logics underlying constructions through which Ashley Smith was celebrityized and sacralized, mothers’, girls’ and women’s subjectivities and agencies are made unknowable and even unthinkable while the racialized social boundaries of a white settler society are maintained. This book attempts to intervene in those logics to help make alternative outcomes possible and to take steps towards questioning the raced, classed and heteronormative boundaries of commonly assumed figures of the “noble victim”, “good girl” and “good mother” while supporting the agencies of adolescent girls in actively playing a part in the authoring of their lives.

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