

The Selective Media

Every year more than 70.000 children go missing in the UK, yet most newspaper readers would find it impossible to think of the name of one missing person. Rarely will the disappearance of a child get more than a small mention in any publication.

In May 2007, then four year old Madeleine McCann was abducted from her family's holiday apartment in Praia Da Lux, Portugal. In the following months her face was on the front page of most national newspapers along with a few foreign papers. The daughter of an apparently loving middle class family touched the hearts of millions and the nation developed great sympathy for the distressed parents. Eight months after the girl's disappearance she still appears on newspapers urging the public not to forget and to update anyone who wants to know on the latest developments.

If the disappearance of one girl is so important to the nation, the question can be asked whether the disappearances of 70 000 children should not be as important. Maybe there are other reasons behind the media frenzy that followed one case yet ignored many others. Madeleine is, or was, a beautiful young girl. Her parents are well respected, middle class, health professionals. The kidnapping was in a foreign country which may have added to the reasons why it makes a great news story, another example of that being the disappearance of Ben Needham who went missing in Greece in 1991. As with the Ben Needham case, some fear Madeleine is a victim of human trade.

In the case of Madeleine McCann the media claimed to be helping the encouragement of her discovery, printing her picture in their papers, on posters and offering rewards. Of course there is an argument that too much exposure too soon could not only have damaged Madeleine's chances of survival, but damaged the investigation itself.

Many mistakes were made in the investigation that much has been made clear in the reports that have been printed in several papers from countless sources. One of the bigger mistakes, maybe something that an American investigation agency would have done differently, were not to question the parents straight away, if for nothing else to exclude them from the rest of the investigation.

To many there may not be any logical reason as to why a parent would hurt their own child, however in more cases than not the perpetrator of violence against children is a parent. A majority of the press never questioned the reasons behind the parents never being investigated. When Gerry and Kate McCann left their other two children to travel to other countries where they were treated like celebrities, no one questioned why someone who had lost a child could smile or look happy. It was seen as courage and hope, and no one found it strange that after losing one child to unknown circumstances, they seemed so eager to leave their other two.

Then the time came when the parents were put under the microscope. There was said, and according to newer sources this is still the case, that there was evidence linking the

parents to the disappearance. The case seemed to have come under a new light, yet many refused to believe that there was a possibility of the parents being involved. Those who printed articles with question marks over Gerry and Kate McCann would quickly backtrack at the slightest sign of it not being true. Maybe that is what the media has become, selective.

Stalin once said “the death of one man is a tragedy; the death of millions is a statistic.” The disappearances of thousands of children do become statistics, but the one child that you get to know will be the one you feel compassion for. Newspapers aren’t sold on statistics, and in some cases not even on facts. They are sold based on what they say, and who they want to say it to. What they decide to print, and what they decide to keep to themselves.

There are many different examples of the selections that take place in media. The selection of which child’s tragedy gets the front page, and which gets thrown away is an extreme selection, but a reality. Something being written doesn’t automatically make true, although it may have elements of it. No one wants to read about a parent killing their child, not on the front page, it has been seen too many times already, they want to read about the hope, faith and happy memories from before a tragedy.

Newspapers are meant to educate us, journalists are supposed to inform their readers and tell them the truth about the world, however harsh. Maybe some way, along the pound signs, the selective media forgot to choose to write the truth.