Abstract

This research will be examining the causation of Moll Flanders' crime, and whether or not her deviance can be deemed “criminal.” Moll's behavior needs to be determined whether or not it is deviant to eighteenth century English social norms, or to England’s governing laws. Skyes and Matza’s Theory of Neutralization, when applied to Moll Flanders, allows the reader to understand the implications of Moll's internal justifications of her behavior and that Moll's actions are not necessarily criminal. Applying Robert Merton’s Anomie Theory allows us to appreciate the societal pressures placed upon Moll to conform to the norms of society. Applying these criminological theories to Moll’s actions will prove that Moll’s “deviant” behavior was a result of her anomie from the gentry in eighteenth-century England. Furthermore, Moll’s “neutralization” will demonstrate her incessant desire to remain apart of the gentry social class by attempting to eliminate the social stigma attached to her criminal activity.

Evidence

- Moll is born in Newgate prison and soon orphaned.
- Moll aspires to be a “gentlewoman” but from an early age does not understand the true meaning of the title.
- Moll marries five different men throughout the course of the novel to remain a “gentlewoman.”
- After Moll’s last husband, the banker dies, she resorts to a life of crime in order to maintain her wealth.
- She rationalizes that crime is her only means of income and when she finds a more “suitable” career choice.
- Decides that she cannot steal from those who are “worse off” than she is.
- See’s her behavior as a result of her condition.

Conclusion

One of the consequences of Moll being born an orphan is that she is not entitled to the same type of social instruction that is offered to children of the middle station or the elite. This blockage has caused Moll to misunderstand the titles of the elite, making Moll believe the status of “gentlewoman” is accessible to her. However, soon after marrying her first husband Robin she realized that her position in the “elite class” is temporary without a husband. Moll’s string of marriages can be seen as her attempt to conform to society and achieve the status of a gentlewoman in a socially acceptable manner. Nevertheless, because of Moll’s anomie her attempt to conform to society only lasts so long and she is forced to achieve society’s goal of status through the adaptation of innovation. Moll’s switch into a life of crime is her way of maintaining her gentlewoman lifestyle within society. As a result of her age, she can no longer marry and turns to a life of crime to maintain her status. Moll neutralizes her actions by rationalizing that she commits crime as a result of her condition; she removes her responsibility by blaming outside forces that prevent her from achieving her wealth in a socially acceptable manner.


