

Caroline Flack Language Investigation



Who was she and why is she my focus?

Caroline Flack was a television personality who was known for presenting the popular ITV shows *Love Island* and *The Xtra Factor*, alongside being the winner of *Strictly Come Dancing* in 2014. She was also known for her tumultuous love life, with the media speculating about her relationships with Prince Harry, Harry Styles and Andrew Brady.

Before her death, Flack faced assault charges which resulted in even more media coverage of her life. She tragically committed suicide in February 2020.

Caroline Flack had a turbulent relationship with the press throughout her life: they covered both the extreme highs and lows of all aspects of her life. She is the focus of my investigation as there are widely differing headlines about her from a variety of mainstream news outlets which will provide me with a diverse corpus to then analyse. Furthermore, the media coverage spans many years and reflects big events in her life, allowing the presentation of her in the press to be explored in more depth.

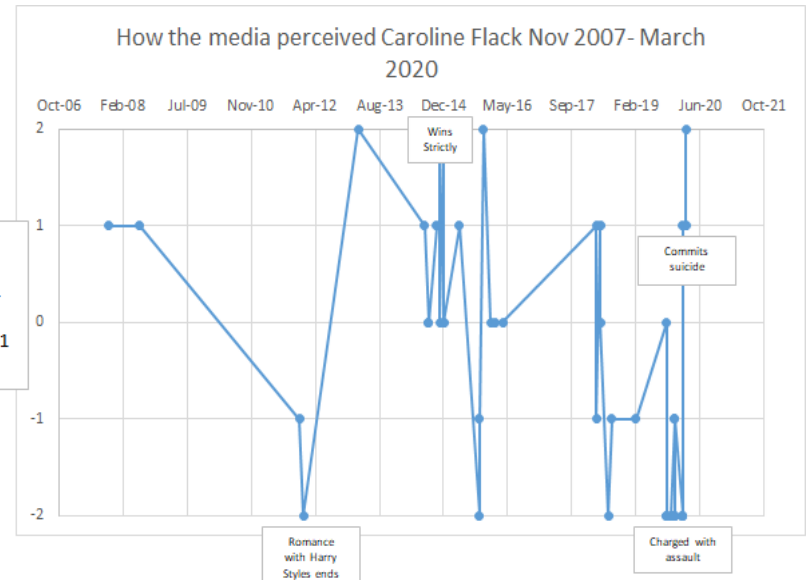
Tabloid and Broadsheet Presentation

Both tabloid and broadsheet media outlets covered elements of Flack's life. Interestingly, in contrast to the images of the front covers from the Sunday Mirror and The Sunday Times from after her suicide, the corpus data does not show a significant difference in the language used to describe her. This is most evident through the use of the noun 'assault' in headlines from both The Guardian and The Sun (17.12.19); the negative connotations are inescapable, however it could be argued that both media outlets are merely reporting on the attack, using legal terms.



Key

Majorly positive 2
Somewhat positive 1
Neutral 0
Somewhat negative -1
Majorly negative -2



As was shown through the graph, the headlines from our corpus differed in their presentation of Flack; some were highly positive whilst others were undeniably negative and these often aligned with significant events in her life.

Influence of events on negative headlines

The majority of the negative headlines about Flack herself are associated with times when Flack was experiencing either personal or career lows, for example her break ups with partners. This is most evident following her break up from Harry Styles where she recalls 'It was a laugh, until I started being called paedophile in the street' (The Independent, 2015); interestingly, this negative headline was published over three years after the breakup. Through quoting Flack herself using 'paedophile', which in itself is a highly controversial term, The Independent is arguably sensationalising a news story which would otherwise be uninteresting to all those but her most ardent followers. The retrospective negative portrayal of her relationships is furthered by Brady, her ex-finance, labelling their relationship as 'toxic' (The Sun, 2019).

Influence of events on positive headlines

Whilst Caroline Flack was alive, the majority of the positive headlines about her were linked to her career and her appearance. She was referred to as a 'star' (BBC Newsbeat, 2014) and a 'pin up girl' (Daily Mail, 2015) in relation to her appearance on *Strictly Come Dancing* and its subsequent tour. In itself, *Strictly* is known as an extravagant Saturday night TV programme which further contributes to the positive presentation of her as a desirable figure.

After her death there was a marked change in media representation of her from someone accused of assault to someone whose death had a devastating impact. The Guardian reported upon her 'tragic' death (2020) and that those who knew her were 'devastated' by her death (2020). The conscious use of such emotive language clearly portrays her as a positive figure, thereby negating the previously negative coverage.



Identifying overall patterns in negative and positive language use

- Both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers use both negative and positive language to describe Flack.
- The majority of negative headlines are associated with times when Flack was experiencing either personal or career lows, for example her break ups with partners.
- The majority of the positive headlines are associated with Flack's career success and the reflections following her death.
- Her appearance is often seen positively (and only commented upon by tabloid newspapers), whereas her actions are seen negatively.
- Negative language isn't just linked to Flack's actions, they are also used to describe projects she is linked to.



Stuart Hall – Reception Theory

Approaching the headlines in the corpus with a constructionist view, it would be argued that the representation of Caroline Flack in the media is at times a sensationalist version of events in real life, sometimes foregrounding trivial elements which are not unbiased news. Furthermore, taking this approach it could be perceived that the coverage of the alleged assault was manipulated in order to create a depiction of Flack as violent, a representation which altered entirely following her suicide. As such, this sudden shift in portrayal may call into question the earlier presentation of Flack and therefore lead to the reader having a negotiated reading of the previous headlines.

Conclusion

It can be argued, based on our study of Caroline Flack, that the British media will create sensational headlines around both a celebrity's personal life, and their career, in order to appeal to their target demographic and maintain their readership. Furthermore, through the headlines analysed from the corpus, it appears that the representation of the celebrity is reflective of the events being reported, whether they be actual news or merely speculative. Through this, the media are able to consciously manipulate the public perception of the celebrity, in this case Caroline Flack.