

Henne, K. & Ventresca, M. (2020). A criminal mind? A damaged brain? Narratives of criminality and culpability in the celebrated case of Aaron Hernandez. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 16(3), 395-413.

This article examines the media discourse surrounding the life and death of former National Football League player Aaron Hernandez, who died by suicide while incarcerated for first-degree murder. As a postmortem analysis found evidence of notable degenerative brain disease, differing explanations and speculations remain about the causes of his criminal behavior. This analysis illustrates how journalistic narratives attribute Hernandez's criminality to either the material composition of his damaged brain or how his tumultuous background affected psychological makeup. Both narratives minimize the structural and political economic conditions that enabled this particular case of celebrated criminality. Cultural criminological and socio-legal insights aid in elucidating how notions of racialized masculinity and neurocriminology come to constitutively inform framings of Hernandez's crimes, motivations, and actions while also directing critical attention away from the influence of relevant institutions, particularly sport, and instrumentalizing the role of violence. This article concludes with a reflection on the underpinning tensions revealed through depictions of Hernandez, his mind, and his brain, arguing that they surpass news and media stories and actually implicate debates about the growing influence of neuroscience in understandings of social problems, including crime.