

TORONTO'S *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS*:
A CULTURAL CRIMINOLOGY EXAMINATION ON SERIAL KILLER BRUCE MCARTHUR
AND THE NEWS MEDIA

by

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ABSTRACT

Toronto's *Little Shop of Horrors*: A Cultural Criminology Examination on Serial Killer Bruce McArthur and the News Media

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Contributing to the dynamic and interdisciplinary field of cultural criminology, this project works to emphasize the destructive, modern forces of consumerism and violence within Toronto's crime-news industry. The paper fuses the canonical and emerging methodologies of content analysis, discourse analysis, and liquid ethnography, to evaluate the framing and editing techniques used to relay the story of Bruce McArthur's predations in The Village (over the 2018 news year). A sample of 365 articles, retrieved from five print media sources, are methodically examined to understand both the local and national agenda-setting strategies of contemporary journalism. Actively contributing to the transformation of human suffering and violence into mass-market pleasure, a *carnival of crime* model (Presdee, 2000) serves as a primary lens for evaluating the hyper-sensationalized reporting styles of modern news makers. Weaving theoretical contributions from the fields of sociology and media studies, the embeddedness of heteronormative, racialized, and ethnocentric tropes common to the news and crime-infotainment industries is also critically evaluated towards raising greater political and social accountability. Crime-centric podcasts are further identified as a leading technological medium for fueling public obsessions with murder and transgressions. Formed by enthusiastic hobbyists and motivated journalists, the producers of podcasting content hastily straddle the realms of entertainment and information sharing. As such, this research calls for immediate awareness and tending to the neoliberal symptoms of boredom and fear existing in our modern world, building on Stanley Cohen's (1972) *moral panic* theory.

Keywords: cultural criminology, serial killer, news media, crime infotainment, McArthur

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This work is presented with great sensitivity and sympathy

to the victims and their families.

May you find peace.

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The Toronto Spectacle of a Serial Murderer

Chapter One

“Communication is taken to be a special and particularly powerful commodity because, in addition to its ability to produce surplus value, it contains symbols and images whose meaning helps to shape consciousness.”

(Mosco, 2009, p. 134)

The 1986 release of the film *Little Shop of Horrors*, that attracted mass followings of the fantasy/sci-fi genre, tells the story of a growing plant that feeds on human flesh and blood. As a struggling flower shop owner yearns for the love of his beautiful co-worker, the demands to satisfy the needs of his talking plant escalates to uncontrollable heights. Celebrated by contemporary audiences, the incorporation of a doo-wop singing group helps to bring a comedic approach to this dark and twisted narrative. *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986) exemplifies themes of violence, pleasure, and consumerism that have pervaded lives in this period of late modernity. Through the news media, we are now constantly confronted with looming fears of dissolution and an erosion of purpose in both our personal and private domains. The horror genre is mirroring our lived realities.

The following paper reflexively investigates current intersections of violence and the news media towards highlighting critical agendas and cultural fascinations with narratives of murder. Conducting a cultural criminology (cultcrim) analyses of Toronto newspaper coverage on the Bruce McArthur serial killer case, this dissertation creatively

extends Mike Presdee's (2000) concept of the *carnival of crime* into contemporary considerations.

The interdisciplinary field of cultural criminology, which examines produced representations of violence and transgression, serves as the theoretical lens of inquiry for this project. Positioned under a critical criminology umbrella, this novel criminological perspective argues for the *phenomenological* experiences of crime to be actively analysed (Wender, 2004). This concept holds an epistemological position, where the constructions of social knowledge and public perceptions are informed through every day *carnavalesque* (Presdee, 2000) encounters between the subject and the social world (further expounded in *Chapter Two*). As Hayward (2010) asserts: "Cultural criminology conceptualizes many transgressive behaviours as attempts to resolve internal conflicts that are themselves spawned by the contradictions and peculiarities of contemporary life" (p. 4).

The liquid interplay and boundless considerations between the researcher and subject, calling for creative and non-traditional methodological approaches, is central to the cultural criminology field. Following Ferrell's (2013) call for reflexive criminological research, the multi-layered presence of crime and the news media must be reviewed through a purposeful embedment in cultural processes. A mixed-methods approach,

including liquid ethnographic and content analyses, is utilized in this project towards analyzing key trends and future implications of the news media machine.

Our Transgressive Culture

Violence has become one of the world's most lucrative and hedonistic currencies for public consumption. Building on centuries of bodily exploitation, colonization, and retributive laws, the expression of physical dominance is entrenched in societal fibres.

The complexity and manifestation of violent acts, evaluated by Thomas Hobbes (1651/1946), emphasizes a dynamic concept of exhilaration, force, and power.

For example, as modern consumers we seek opportunities to decompress from work and family stresses through virtual gaming or sidelining a sports match. The yearly Super Bowl football game, for the championship of the National Football League, is a clear example of a cultural pastime that has engrossed the American existence and wallets.

The incessant development of technology devices (utilized both within the criminal justice sector and purchased for personal consumption) have only served to enhance opportunities for this violence satiation at any age. Barriers of internet connections and limited recreational times have been struck down through competitive incentives by corporations to keep bodies addicted to modern technologies.

We no longer must leave the confines of our living room or local watering hole to witness (and participate) in violence. See Brown (2000), Muzzatti (2010), and Young (2010) for layered considerations of violence in contemporary society.

1.1: Growing Up in a Transgressive World

The active consumption of violence, through produced images and storylines, is a notable pastime across all generations. The celebration of triumph, destruction, and power has become a normalized pillar of community (dating back centuries). In modernity, we are taught from childhood that feelings of pleasure and collectiveness can be satisfied through engagement with technology. It is this dependent relationship that fuels critiques on the institution of news media.

Enthrallments with images of evil characters and violent narratives arguably originates in childhood. In addition to the exposure of hyper-aggressive sporting activities, the production of kid-centered programming largely depends on the identification and abolishment of wicked characters. The *Disney* franchise's villains (e.g., Ursula from *The Little Mermaid*, Jafar from *Aladdin* and Scar from *The Lion King*) remain the most dynamic and complex figures from these productions. We are warned to be fearful (yet curious) of their difference.

The popularity and promotion of spooky Halloween costumes, complete with masks and plastic weapons, is another socialized marker of an average childhood in North America.

Memories of playing childhood board games, such as *CLUE* or *Murder Mystery Party*, are highlighted as an additional channel for the consumption of creative transgressions. Assuming the roles of a crime investigator, the player is encouraged to piece together violent acts and adopt the mindset of a killer to successfully win each round. The most imaginative stories of violence and escape are commonly celebrated in these games.

Note: the evolution of crime games has continued to magnify with the development of the exclusive subscription-based game *Hunt a Killer*. This application-based service delivers monthly murder cases at players' doorsteps equipped with elaborate clues, pieces of evidence and creative instructions and letters for solving crimes. Within this medium, players are encouraged to exercise their perceptions about crime (often fueled by the amplifications of news media) towards a superficial understanding of public violence. The tag line "What if a serial killer delivered a package to your doorstep each month?" further exploits public obsessions with blood and murder.

As young adolescents, threads of aggression and retribution found in popular culture have become influential subjects of socialization. The ownership and participation in both video/computer and board games is an elementary source for youths (and even adults) to shed their social realities and embrace visual narratives of violence and victory. The anonymity of this platform, where players can adopt creative usernames and are represented as mythical creatures, serves to foster an immediate dependence on themes of escapism and pleasure within young minds.

Modern hazing culture, which only intensifies with the influence of social media, remains a prominent example of how violence can simultaneously be celebrated and harmful for youth and adults. Regularly overlooked by institutions, social pressures towards conforming to popular gender identities and stereotypes often result in outrageous expressions of aggression. Coupled with generational tolerance for violence and a toxic athletic culture, transgressions have become an anticipated period of behaviour for youth. The 2018 investigation of the private all-boys school *St. Michael's College School*, located in downtown Toronto, emphasizes the permanent impact that group violence and a detached administration can have on the futures of communities. Seven students were ultimately charged in connection to allegations of sexual assault and physical attacks towards a peer that resulted in irreversible trauma (Warren, 2018).

The resignation of the school principle and extensive media coverage that followed sparked outrage from societal members towards the dynamic socializations of violence in our contemporary world (a practice that the average person actively subscribes to when consuming popular movies or playing sports). Note: striving to eliminate the presence of violence in our schools must originate with an acknowledgement for the occupancy of transgressive and damaging narratives that saturate all aspects of our lives – beginning in childhood.

The worlds of fashion, music, literature, and adverts are all responsible for the perpetuation of brigand stereotypes. A self-gratifying edge is ingrained in the development of these competitive products. The ‘outlaw’ and ‘troublemaker’ labels, generated through popular culture and community fears, are prominent influencers in transgressive behaviours amongst youth and adults. A black leather jacket, Billie Eilish’s industrial metal music or the taboo eroticism described in E.L. James’ *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy have become cultural objects laced with stereotypes of difference and rebellion. Stanley Cohen’s (1972) seminal discussion, key to this dissertational analysis, on the creation of moral panics surrounding the stylized fashions and perceived menace-driven behaviours of two conflicting subcultural groups in Britain (referred to as the Mods and Rockers) emphasizes the cycles of fear and political embellishments in a period of societal

upheaval. Over forty-five years later, the presence of destructive labels only intensifies with the developments of technology.

In adulthood, the prominence of violently charged activities continues to multiply and manifest into various formats for consumption. Although some methods of retribution are politically and socially challenged, such as the responses to soldier deployments, policing practices within inner-city neighborhoods, and debates over corporal/capital punishments, themes of aggression and dominance are often woven through the nucleus of group socializations. In the most extreme circumstances, these displays of violence and activism can result in the serial killings of innocent members of Toronto's LGBTQ community.

1.2: Spartans of Sports

Evaluated through an *agonistic model* (critically used by Adorno, 1978), where victory and transcendence are only evaluated through the total-destruction of the opponent(s), the intersection of sports and popular culture fuels a toxic and damaging perception of violence in modernity (Colaguori, 2012). This adversarial power works to repeatedly redefine notions of fairness and competition in a consumer-centric world.

The ongoing development and continual funding of the international Olympic events over previous centuries, rooted in Greek traditions, is one example of a global

obsession with the physical assertion of a human's dominance and strength. Hosting countries inject billions of dollars into the planning, building, organization, and operation stages of this sporting event with the hopes of securing viewers and gaining additional capital. Furthermore, corporations are eager to engage in promotional endorsement deals with athletes and facilities as part of this sporting initiative. This economic spiral has even shifted to the international bidding process for future hosting gigs by cities where competitions centered on aggression and strength seem to be forever engrained in our global climate.

An ultimate or final competition also remains a pivotal element to individual sporting cultures where each season ends in a gruesome match between two noteworthy teams/opponents. After a lengthy playoff and elimination phase, fans are treated to a faceoff full of determination and physical power. In addition to the glamorous trophy, the monetary fortune(s) awarded to the victor(s) should not be excluded from this violent equation. The huge followings surrounding American football, hockey, boxing, European football, MMA fighting, motor racing, and martial arts (to name a few) is another key element to the carnival of sports in our modern world. Often the source for fantasy sports betting by viewers, the annihilation of an opponent can be a

lucrative wager. Even without any financial gamble, violence is routinely sensationalized into a sporting spectacle of aggression and resilience.

Consuming the Athlete: A Reflection

On August 26, 2017, sports enthusiasts and probing minds were fixated on the confrontations of athletic ability, nationalistic pride and social class between two celebrated professional fighters (one boxer and one mixed martial artist). Following a three-country promotional tour, including a brief stop in Toronto, and countless hours of broadcast commentary, *The Money Fight* between Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Conor McGregor swelled into a global spectacle of violence and destruction that I had to witness. As viewers were encouraged to place monetary bets on their choice fighter and invest in pay-per-view programming to receive unrestricted access to this androcentric and thrilling event, I spent hours before the fight frantically searching the internet for a free streaming channel.

Broadcast technologies offer a pleasurable consumption space with minimal direct consequences for the viewer. It is within this entertainment sphere where violent and harmful actions, that are traditionally condemned in modern society, are celebrated and rewarded. The sparring of gladiators and clashing of titans is a familiar and profitable broadcast narrative. Audiences are invited to suspend their daily commitments, while indulging in the humiliation of others. Whether you are a loyal fan on boxing or became a one-day viewer like myself, a curiosity to witness this fight live was too great to ignore. I wanted to be included in this spectacle of violence!

The amplified production and spectacle of *The Money Fight*, complete with celebrity endorsements, forcefully contributed to an unrelenting expansion of carnivalesque violence within our modern world. The fear and uncertainty that engulfs members of the working class is nurtured through the repeated images of bloodshed and pain.

1.3: Mediums of Violence

Our television screens (including technological advancements in portable devices) have served as a primary source for the dissemination of violent culture. Embedded in the development of documentary, reality and fictional drama programming, viewers remain accessible targets for the consumption of transgressive narratives. The camera functions as a panoptic gateway for the audience to enter the (often) distant realms of the criminal justice sector (re: Foucault, 1975/1995). An exploration of gang culture through the eyes of a convict, the observation of police/investigative operations, or the pseudo-participation in top speed vehicular chases are a few of the thrilling (and rehearsed) storylines found in modern television production. The capturing of these restricted and isolated populations grants audiences with moments of emotional indulgence and discovery.

Furthermore, the recycled nature of horror plots (re. *Scary Movie* (2000-2013) and *Sharknado* (2013-2018) film series) war re-enactments (re. World War II movies ranging from *Casablanca* (1942), *Schindler's List* (1993) to *Dunkirk* (2017)) and depictions of criminal enterprises (re. *The Godfather* series (1972-1990) and *Gangs of New York* (2002)) found through a cursory review of broadcast programming over the past century is a clear indicator towards the profitability and public enthrallments of this transmitted genre.

In late modernity, an outbreak of transgressive programming also continues to magnify with special effects technology that enables audiences to be transported to multiple universes and time periods. Themes of revenge and aggression can now be magnified amongst future dystopian societies or through historical reflections of eras past. Regardless of the make-up, 3D equipment, and computer-generated imagery, stereotypical storylines of 'good versus evil' are routinely repeated across a variety of highly produced backdrops.

The podcast medium is a more recent platform designed to fulfill immediate audience needs for thrilling crime stories. Functioning as a new incarnation of the true crime novel, the murder podcast has exploded as a popular episodic topic within digital or video files. Coupled with a weighty need to escape the bleak conditions of late

modernity, the consumer's intrigue into the mindset and breeding of serial murderers has only intensified through this portable channel. Viewers can continue their private consumption of transgressive narratives through an isolated audio storyteller.

Categorized as a form of horizontal media, where consumers can easily adopt the roles of the producer and distributor, the podcast continues to actively disturb the traditional radio business. Not only are celebrities incorporating a podcast channel as another strategy to monopolize their social status, but the average consumer can also inject their talents as a content creator. A self-imposed 'expert' title is assumed by anyone recording their views on a contemporary topic. The ability for listeners to download episodes, usually at no expense, stands as a distinctive feature to this recent medium.

The incessant development of newer channels for accessing transgressive narratives highlights larger neoliberal issues of power, greed, and privilege in our modern world. If contemporary communities continue to face barriers of regulation (both economic and social), we will forever be adopting newer consumption technologies to temporarily compress our wounds.

1.4: Mediascapes and Rituals

The process of globalization that emphasizes an interdependence of economies, cultures, and populations serves as the prominent stage on which modern livelihoods are formed. Through trade networks and commercial deals, flows of products and knowledge have become dominant means in connecting people on a global scale. Arjun Appadurai (1996), a renowned anthropologist and theorist of globalization studies, identifies five distinct *scapes* towards categorizing cultural flow within our contemporary world: *ethnoscapes*, *technoscapes*, *financescapes*, *ideoscapes*, and *mediascapes*. These classifications underscore the impacts of technological advancements and desires for economic efficiencies that are maintained by governments and market leaders.

Reflecting similar features of rapid speed, scale, and volume associated with the global domination of each category, *mediascapes* refers to both the technological production and dissemination of information through various media outlets (Appadurai, 1996). In contrast to early telecommunication strategies of Morse code (early 1830s), signal lamps (1867) and wireless telegraphy (1893), modern communication allows for the immediate relaying of information across all boundaries. A violent terrorist attack in France is instantly documented via cellphones and publically shared on social media. An impending hurricane circulating in the Atlantic Ocean is tracked through satellites and

forewarned to the public via radio. A public inquisition into the potential unethical actions of a political leader is broadcast live via the use of film cameras and printed journalistic commentary. In all of these instances, we are reminded of the importance and human dependence of information sharing in this digital age.

Over the past decade, the expansion of media reporting and narratives into online publications, downloadable Apps, and social media platforms has only served to cement the unyielding function of storytelling in late modernity. The mediascape of knowledge sharing continues to swell with money and the acquisition of any voices as content producers (with the podcast serving as their most recent vehicle of broadcast). Our senses are both satisfied and saturated through inundations of selected and edited narratives transmitted via the media.

Monotony in Modernity

Circulating within this period of late modernity, filled with economic uncertainty and shifting power relations, media narratives function as a space-filler in our routine-based lives. Drawing on Ferrell's (2004) concept of the *machinery of boredom*, the commodification of violence (through varying formats) offers a momentary escape from harsh economic and social realities of neoliberalism. Viewers are easily transported into realms of excitement and action, where they can assume temporary pseudo-identities of

crime hunters or accomplices, when watching transgressive narratives. Within an era of strict financial regulations and political fluctuations, the consumption of crime media is one small rebellious act.

William Gamson (2004) uses the term “strategies” to describe processes of media framing where producers engage in discursive opportunities to relay selected narratives (p. 306). The dynamics behind content development, including who is identifying newsworthy stories and images, is often an overlooked element in the consumption cycle of crime media. Unlike popular television series and movies, the news medium has been granted an official legitimacy through the routine dissemination of information. Collecting the morning paper or tuning in to the six o’clock broadcast report are activities etched in the social lives of advanced communities. The rehearsed tones of the reporters, recycled headlines, and crime-scene images are standardized elements in daily news stories that are anticipated by audiences. As journalists seek to report the truth on assigned leads, my role as an academic is to emphasize trends and societal realities existing between the lines.

The transportability of technology has only enhanced consumption processes where audiences can tune-in during their commutes, lunch hours, and waits in the school pick-up line. This malleable characteristic of a modern medium allows for customers to

remain active participants in vivid realities of violence, chase, and apprehension. Portable battery chargers and adapters have even been designed and sold to ensure audiences can maintain a constant stream of these mediatized images.

As technology continues to acquire faster and portable versions, the accessibility of social media platforms has also advanced with innovative additions for reporting minute-by-minute updates for subscribers. The adoption and continuous use of Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook accounts by individual news reporters is one example of this unremitting cycle of content production. Furthermore, news agencies have also developed specific Social Media or Content Coordinator roles tasked with the identification and dissemination of relevant societal events.

Evaluating the function and space of the media within everyday life, Nick Couldry (2003) employs the term *ritual* to emphasize exercises of legitimacy made by daily consumers. Synonymous with notions routine and habitual practices, the consumption of media images is engrained into the modern existences of millions and granted overwhelming power towards shaping perceptions. Considering the extent of corporate control and framing constructions behind the dissemination of popular narratives, Couldry (2003) highlights the lack of public agency within the daily cycles of news

production. This inconsistency and the unrelenting development of technologies calls for the continuous assessment of media stories in our modern culture.

The commodification of violence through media representations relies on an apparent replication of everyday life. Stories of crime and transgression encourage viewers to fully submerge themselves and seek a pleasurable release from their habitual boredom. The production and framing of crime stories must adhere to a prescribed template of stereotypes and vindications that are instantly recognizable and can be effectively transmitted to the viewer.

The added points of humiliation and public degradations, as commonly witnessed through *The Jerry Springer Show* (1991-2018) and *America's Funniest Videos* (1989-present) programs, also serve to amplify the amusement of audiences and challenge the humanity of content producers. Unfortunately, feelings of remorse or concern for participants are often overshadowed by glitzy imagery and selfish consumption practices. The technological distance between the audience and crime narrative works to ignite a NIMBYism (acronym for "not in my backyard") of detachment towards true conditions of late modernity. The cultural criminological voice is confronted with an overabundance of transgressive media content to critically dissect and situate within larger societal gravities of consumerism and power.

1.5: The 'Carnival' of News Production

The June 26, 2017 disappearance of Andrew Kinsman, a member of Toronto's LGBTQ2 community, initiated a familiar (and brief) media ritualization of mass broadcast. Nightly news stories, social media descriptions and posted missing-person flyers were circulated as part of police routines and community concerns. The selected image of Kinsman, wearing a green t-shirt with a *Bob & Doug McKenzie* logo (program originating in 1980), peering straight at the camera with a slight, bearded smile became a societal marker for another mysterious disappearance. The uncovering of a local serial predator, to be recognized and examined within global conversations, was never predicted in our city of Toronto.

The Bruce McArthur serial murder investigation has dominated airwaves and policing resources since January 2018 (with acknowledgement of previous investigations and charges administered to McArthur by the Toronto Police Service in 2003). Framed as a scene from a true-crime Hollywood production, Canadian (and international) audiences witnessed the unraveling of a self-employed landscaper's double-life as a sexual predator and murderer. As investigators examined the properties of all McArthur's clients, the bodies of eight missing men from Toronto's LGBTQ community were identified through

meticulous forensic processing. Appealing to the public for help in tracking down the next of kin, the cultural diversity of these victims became a notable element of these transgressions -- that were subsequently omitted from dominant media discourse (see *Appendix One*). A noteworthy part of McArthur's profiling, largely neglected from edited narratives of the chosen media sample, is the South Asian or Middle Eastern backgrounds of the many victims (reviewed in *Chapter Four*). With some of these men working to maintain heteronormative routines and others experiencing marginalization within their already marginalized race/ethnic communities, colonial themes of objectification and consumption are glaringly apparent. Concepts of *the gaze* (re. Mulvey (1989)) must be further considered towards the purposeful avoidance of the media on issues of race and queerness in relation to their coverage of the McArthur case. Note: most victims also struggled with securing housing, stable employment and substance addictions. These issues were also overlooked in the news reporting of these violent crimes.

Challenging popular societal assumptions related to age, sexuality, and profession, the McArthur case has demanded a public reimagining of murderous perpetrators within our Canadian society. Confronting markers of being a young, attractive, and socially awkward male (see Egger, 1998; Vronsky 2004), typically affiliated with the infamous crimes of Ted Bundy and Charles Manson, this contemporary serial killer was initially

regarded as an ideal and respected member of the community. The circulation of images depicting McArthur as a shopping-mall Santa Claus, reminiscent of John Wayne Gacy's charitable services of dressing up as Patches the Clown for charities and children's parties, is one eerie element of this ever-expanding case.

In *Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime*, the late Mike Presdee (2000) critically examines the complex intersections of consumerism, transgressive behaviours, and performance within modernity. Highlighting accounts of callousness and murder, including references to school shootings in the United States and rural Canada, a series of nail-bomb attacks in London, and the execution of a popular female television presenter, Presdee (2000) offers a confrontational and progressive model towards evaluating violence and transgression – the *carnival of crime*. Serving as the theoretical nucleus for the non-conventional and illimitable research of cultural criminologists, the carnival emphasizes the toxic relations of capitalism and pleasure within contemporary society and has been referenced throughout this chapter. A prioritization of the biographical accounts in everyday life remains a central feature of this criminological perspective (Presdee, 2004).

Cultural criminology offers a broad space for scholars to engage in creative, mixed-methods research that disrupts traditional quantitative analysis. Employing this

progressive criminological perspective, the following project examines the contemporary phenomenon of murder represented through Toronto news publications, from January to December 2018, with the aim to inform audiences of the dynamic and intertwining webs of media reporting and the criminal justice system. As larger societal mechanisms of control within the Canadian landscape are cleverly masqueraded through public media routines and stereotypes, the ongoing critique of news production is imperative towards the identification of true lived realities. *Chapter Two* will further justify a cultural criminology approach chosen for this research. Interdisciplinary methodological strategies towards identifying and interpreting the sample of articles are shared in *Chapter Three*, defending the necessity for qualitative analysis within criminology studies. The opportunity to review larger social fears and motivations linked to consuming crime media are further detailed in *Chapter Four*. This work also identifies the serial podcast as the most recent addition to the mediated crime cycles (see *Chapter Five*) of late modernity. Fueled by fear and intrigue viewers are relentless in the tracking of new content and mediums for obtaining their transgressive fixes.

Audience fascinations with violent and destructive narratives have adapted over centuries with the advancement of technology and cultural norms. Regardless the medium, human curiosity towards the behaviour of others remains a societal yardstick

for self-comparison and entertainment. Wrapped in a world of routine structures and political motivations, this paper argues for a critical evaluation of the news media as a powerful force in the public's infatuation with violence. If we want to further understand and reduce crime rates in our cities, we must first critically dissect the networks of knowledge production.

"The political processes of the powerful have the ability to make criminals of us one day and heroes the next. It is this criminalizing process that provides the fertile ground for the eruption of carnival and ensures that the successful second life of the people remains intact".

(Presdee, 2000, pp. 16-17)

Public Outrage, Policing and the Carnival of Crime-Media Discourse

Chapter Two

“There is nothing left for the consumer to classify. Producers have done it for him.”

(Horkheimer and Adorno, 1944, p. 125)

The city of Toronto has faced immense tragedy and instances of violence over the 2018 calendar year. Residents and news audiences reacted to the devastations of the Yonge Street van attack, the Danforth Street shootings, increases in gun violence, and the uncovering of the McArthur serial killings through a stream of media coverage. Critical conversations about police violence, political responses, and community vulnerabilities fiercely swirled through our public consciousness igniting much debate about the functioning of our criminal justice systems.

Marking the seven-month anniversary to the senseless gun violence in Toronto’s Greek Village, where two young women lost their lives and several were injured, municipal news broadcasts focused their February 21, 2019 coverage on the legal contentions of firearm possessions in Canada. While watching this nightly news reporting, I was struck in amazement by the Toronto Police Service - Chief Mark Saunders’ remarks to the media: “The public forum isn’t really the platform for discussions on law because it is incredibly complex and not fair” (Saunders, 2019).

For decades, the media has functioned as a primary guide for public assessments of current events and political contests. Used to ignite public fears, support, and awareness, the media plays a purposeful role within late modernity and remains an integral medium for police transparency to audiences. Chief Saunders' comment further highlights moments of manipulation and control affiliated with news production, where the discretion of reporters and societal leaders relentlessly guide this industry. The need for a cultural criminological analysis has never been so pertinent!

2.1: An Evolving Discipline

To improve longstanding criticisms of public transparency and weak community bonds, the Toronto Police Service has recently relaunched a Public Safety Data Portal (<http://data.torontopolice.on.ca>) that immediately displays city-wide crime statistics. Fulfilling public needs towards incessant evaluations of societal violence, this feature allows individuals to search by specific crime acts, identify high-activity police divisions, and compare statistics to previous months and years of reporting. Accessible through Smartphone technologies and colour-coded to maximize reader ease, this initiative contributes to the consumed storms of violence that are overtaking late modernity.

Assessing societal risks and reducing harmful crimes have become politicized components of our contemporary society, where uncountable amounts of public and

corporate currencies are continuously injected to ignite change. Government campaigns and electoral speeches are saturated with advancements in crime prevention strategies towards making communities safer and monopolizing collective fears of violence. In Toronto, debates over the operation of safe-injection sites and the perceived increases in gun culture have recently dominated media narratives and public fears. Looming threats of societal deterioration and race-based anarchy, unashamedly infused into these stories, work to control perceptions on the municipal health of our community.

As public sector workers and criminal justice professionals (including the contributions of Academia) actively strive to eradicate violence and societal deterioration, we are also dependent on this very element for means of employment and recreational pleasure. Acts of violence are fueling the cultural landscapes and functions of social institutions within our current society that must be actively examined.

The discipline of criminology continues to evolve towards a diverse realm of societal critique and cultural evaluation. Mimicking disagreeing public debates on how to address community violence, criminologists offer dynamic perspectives on the initiation and subsequent impacts of criminal activities (predominantly through a progressive Western-cultural lens). Stemming from a biological composition (re: 19th century scholar Cesare Lombroso) or from environmental bonds (re: 1920s Chicago School

contributions), researchers have considered and disputed varying rationales for the persistence of societal deviance. These insular perspectives continue to monopolize contemporary narratives of violence and require further considerations for the varying cultural specificities present in modernity. Limiting the boundaries of cultural investigation, these viewpoints have highlighted the need for an interdisciplinary approach towards studying crime.

Self-identified as the *carnival chasers* of late modernity, cultural criminologists are actively tracking the intersections of crime, media, and culture in everyday life. Examining the content of car and motorcycle advertisements, the framing of violent transgressors in the news media, the glamorized worlds of retribution found in popularized video games, or the incessant production of reality-based crime programs, this interdisciplinary study of criminology offers progressive interpretations for the impacts of politics and capitalism in our contemporary society. Embedded into this perspective is the conscious confrontation of popular stereotypes and embellished narratives that categorize different bodies within produced hierarchies of status, power, value, and merit. More specifically, the deconstruction of public discourse around race/gender inequalities and processes of *othering* is essential in the pursuit of mediated truths by cultural criminologists. The attitudes and discriminatory perspectives of content producers is also critical to review in

this field of inquiry. The implementation of diverse interpretive methodologies, such as liquid ethnographies, also influence the dynamic nature of this theoretical perspective. Self-identified as a cultural criminologist, my scholarly perspectives are also consumed with the identification and examination of the intersections of transgressive bodies and public awareness within a technology-centered world.

Imagine yourself walking through the middle of Yonge and Dundas Square in downtown Toronto at any point during the day. Amidst the bright lights, crowds of tourists, and numerous vendor stands, your senses become completely consumed with the multiplicity of lives crossing paths in one set space. You are mesmerized by the dozens of billboards, some equipped with moving images, that promote the latest action film or sports car. The smells of marijuana being smoked waft past you. The sounds of honking cabs and police guards directing traffic continue to magnify with every step. You witness people sporting tattoos, jerseys, satirical tee-shirts (and these are the people fully clothed!) intersecting in this city nucleus. All your senses are awaking with an energy of culture and everyday life.

The work of cultural criminologists is inspired by the junctures of identity, consumerism, and transgressions produced through innumerable mediums. The omnipresent life worlds of crime are ever present and multiplying through dynamic social

behaviours. A walk through a busy urban center or a quiet afternoon consuming Netflix establishes these moments of sensory saturation. We have become accepting participants in a world governed by fear and pleasure. Consequently, this societal encapsulation, with moments of risk and images of violence, only serves to maximize gains for the elite.

This growing field of criminological research far surpasses printed statistical reports or policy recommendations and demands further acknowledgement for the impacts of late modernity on the survival of consumers. Emphasizing an oversimplification of structure and scholarly limitations associated with traditional criminology, the late Mike Presdee (1994) remains a prominent guiding voice towards intersectional studies of crime and culture. This dynamic approach to studying the presence of violence in our communities invites a level of refined creativity by researchers and serves as the theoretical lead for this project.

This chapter identifies and justifies the implementation of a cultural criminological approach towards the analysis of sample news publications focused on the Bruce McArthur investigation in Toronto. The theoretical underpinnings and origins of this criminological perspective are thoroughly outlined in this section of the project, to

further legitimize and situate the “carnival of crime” amongst a storm of unrelenting consumerist conditions.

2.2: Evaluating Violence

Theoretical approaches of deviance have been traditionally apportioned into two differing categories - towards evaluating the biological/psychosocial or environmental perspectives leading to transgressive actions. Supported by scholarship produced from varying collectives and international settings, these standpoints have served as cemented pillars within academic discourse. A brief survey of a standard undergraduate course on criminological theory will display a principal focus on these customary approaches to studying violence (with a concluding lecture serving as a catch-all for alternate perspectives on gender, environmental, and critical criminology). As a course takeaway, no single theory can sufficiently reason why people engage in deviant acts – human behaviour cannot be isolated from larger cultural and social factors.

Biological & Psychosocial Theories

Stemming from the eighteenth century, the *positivist perspective* accentuates the impact of natural laws on community members’ actions. These scholars contend the presence of biological pre-dispositions, beyond the control of the individual, that influences their agency and decision-making. An argument commonly associated with the

trajectory of the eugenics movement, Cesare Lombroso's (1876/2006) criminological theory identifies distinguishing characteristics (such as a small forehead and large face, protruding ears, bushy eyebrows, sizable teeth, and tattoos) that can serve as a checklist to detect societal transgressors. Expanding on the neuroanatomist and physiologist work of Franz Joseph Gall (1800s), Cesare Lombroso (1876/2006) exclaims: "... germs of an ancestral past lie dormant in our heredity. In some unfortunate individuals, the past comes to life again. These people are innately driven to act as a normal ape or savage would...". Using the heads of deceased criminals as his subjects, Lombroso's (1876/2006) science established interpretive patterns that gained many supporters (through the nineteenth century) of the *born criminal* idea.

Fraught with controversy, this positivism perspective negates to acknowledge circumstantial factors (such as environment or poverty) which can also further influence someone towards engaging in violent activities. Being too simplistic and insular this standpoint allows intellectual space for an exploration of free will.

The classical criminology era (originating during the eighteenth century) worked to reject biological explanations of deviance and emphasize elements of human nature, and agency. Cornish and Clarke's (1987) *rational choice theory* argues that deviant acts are always backed by a conscious decision where the benefits of transgressing perceivably

outweigh any punishment. Adopting a utilitarian belief that all persons are reasoned beings and primarily motivated by self-interest, this theory aligns with retributive mindsets of punishment: 'If a person decided to gamble their freedom by engaging in a deviant act(s), then they deserve to be held legally responsible'. To what degree a person should be punished, including public critiques on the utilization and administration of prison institutions, remains a central debate within this theoretical approach.

The notion of incapacitation, keeping known criminals away from recidivist opportunities, is further offered as a complimentary form of punishment towards countering rational choice theories of crime. It is the belief that every action is coupled with a natural consequence.

Nineteenth-century theories on crime and delinquency also include philosophies contending a lack of intelligence and/or low economic standing as influencing factors for why individuals commit violent transgressions. Like psychoanalytic theories that suggest delinquency is a manifestation of either an underdeveloped/overdeveloped ego, the *feble-mindedness* argument refers to a weakening state and deficiency in the reasoning of the brain. Serving to reinforce societal standards of elitism, this perspective asserts that those who are poorly educated or suffer from a mental illness are destined for a life of crime. Labeled as the *dangerous class*, lower income populations remained a target for

justifications of violence through the following decades and into the contemporary era (Jones, 1976).

Sociological Theories

Commonly identified as a leading architect in the development of modern social science, Émile Durkheim's (1893/1933) theoretical focus on the interconnectedness of society and culture remains a prominent framework for analyzing human behaviour.

Alerted to discovering the materialization and effects of societal facts, Durkheim (1893/1933) argues a science of institutions as the basis of all sociological research. This functionalist paradigm emphasizes *systems* as being a primary function in attributing stability and order to the social world. Our healthcare, education, government, criminal justice systems etc. do not only operate on a set of policies and laws - they also are directly correlated with the shaping of our conducts and perspectives.

Durkheim's (1893/1933) concept of the *division of labor* further emphasizes the complexities of modern societies versus traditional communities of homogenous beliefs, values, and backgrounds. The multicultural nature of contemporary culture, including variances in education, skill, wealth, and perspectives, works to challenge any common consciousness and ignite working class frustrations. Impacted by automatization and total

earnings, the ongoing labor stoppages within the North America automobile industry is an escalating example of this labor division.

Most notably, Durkheim's (1893/1933) concept of *anomie* remains a prominent feature of late modernity. This condition involves the disintegration or disappearance of common values, specifically during periods of flux and instability, that serves to isolate people and generate normlessness. Forming a savage world of individualistic pursuits, it is argued that a lack of community structure and shared goals can only increase feelings of loneliness amongst communities. Durkheim's (1897/1952) research, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, examines the intersections of religion and community in relation to rates of suicides. Results conclude that since Protestant culture placed higher value on the element of individualism, allowing for moments of emotional distress to be experienced in isolation, parishioners were more susceptible to suicide. Contrastingly, members of the Catholic faith were at a decreased risk of harming themselves, due to stronger notions of cohesion and sharing amongst this group. The importance of strong social ties, maintained through periods of change, continues to merit significant sociological and criminological consideration and reinforces the accuracy of Durkheim's (1897/1952) scholarship.

Robert K. Merton's (1938) development of *structural strain theory*, adding to Durkheim's (1893/1933) anomie perspective, outlines an additional consideration towards the impacts of environment and societal pressures on the actions of populations. It is argued that people turn to criminal activity because of a lack of achievable means to secure socially accepted goals (such as legitimate employment, proper housing, or a commendable reputation). Thus, crime is a by-product of frustrations affiliated with the lived realities of people and the presences of societal structures. Coining the term *self-fulfilling prophecy*, Merton (1938) suggests that people will continue to confirm expectations of deviancy when they are unable to meet perceived standards of preferred societal behaviours. Class divisions and poverty are further maintained through societal variances in opportunities.

Focusing on the frustrations associated with lower-class living, social structure/ecological theories emphasize reasons of economics and conformity towards understanding why crime persist in impoverished areas. The celebrated work of the Chicago School's Shaw and McKay (1942) offers a *social disorganization theory* towards evaluating the breakdown in social institutions (including family, school, and employment) within low income neighbourhoods that encourages the formation of delinquent subcultures (e.g., gang association). Although not making a direct correlation

between poor communities and the increases in delinquency, Shaw and McKay (1942) argue that these areas function as high *transition zones* with elevated rates of population turnover. Within these spaces there is often a greater concentration of disadvantage residents (including immigrants and generations of poverty) and limited access to social support services. The lack of stability amongst these communities fosters a dog-eat-dog mentality for obtaining any financial or status security. These scholars further propose a *cultural deviance theory* that underlines public conformity towards any celebrated cultural norms (specifically of transgressive nature) that explains growing crime rates in low-income areas (Shaw & McKay, 1942).

Talcott Parsons (1951), renowned structural functionalist and supporter of positivist thought, argues the importance of societal organization and community structure over the comportment of the individual, when considering prime influences of crime. To Parsons (1937), it is imperative that the field of social science assesses the ideals, ends, and purposes when evaluating a person's actions. This *action theory*, which works to merge worlds of structural analysis with voluntary theory, is influenced by *Weberian social action theory* (1978) that highlights a person's ability to adapt actions towards potentially reaching desired results. In both theories, an action does not solely have meaning but can also generate unintended inactions and cause societal shifts.

Modern society consists of a system built on broad patterns of conduct and shared values. Thus, problems in a single part of the community can disrupt the whole.

The current operation of the criminal justice system, functioning through a lateral progression of police – courts – imprisonment, is a prime example of how desired actions can have subsequent tremors within the community. The process of reintegration, which varies on availability of resources, often leads to further recidivist activities and harm.

Challenging critiques of oversimplification and hyper-focus on the crimes of the deprived, Sampson and his colleagues (1999) further insert the notion of *collective efficacy* to explain instances where communities, through shared beliefs and values, can successfully control the likelihood of transgressive actions. Working together to organize and enforce communal standards of living and acceptable actions Sampson et al. (1999) contend that deviant activities are significantly eliminated with high rates of collective efficacy. This added perspective highlights the importance of social bonds, in addition to economic disparity, when evaluating crime occurrences and the organization of social spaces.

In summary, these ecological theories of crime embrace a sociological lens towards understanding intersections of class and social controls. Often referenced in contemporary discussions about violence, these arguments do not account for white-

collar crimes or the influences of larger societal relationships and mediated narratives on the actions of individuals.

Social Process Theories

Contributing to the collection of behaviourist learning theories related to human conditioning, Albert Bandura (1977) contends the influence of social environments and the processes of stimuli and reaction on the considerations of youth deviancy. It is the routine of observation and interpretation, as tested in Bandura et. al's (1961) renowned Bobo Doll experiment, that encourages imitations of transgressive attitudes. Thus, if an adolescent habitually plays a violent videogame (such as *Call of Duty* (released from 2003 to 2019) or *Mortal Combat* (released from 1992 to 2019)), they are more prone to embody destructive and aggressive manners in their daily lives. This argument is commonly applied to the occurrences of school shootings in contemporary society, where broadcast profiles of the perpetrator are filled with the stereotypical identifications and inflated analyses of perceived recreational choices. A brief survey of media reports on the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School and Aurora, Colorado Movie Theatre shootings will highlight this mediated routine of reporting youth violence that are filled with embellished stereotypes and assumptions. Note: there are millions of

players in these gaming worlds that continue to productively contribute to society sans the participation in illegal activities.

Within the learning theories of deviance, Edwin Sutherland's (1939) contribution of the *differential association perspective* focuses on how people learn to become criminals rather than the underling motivations of an individual towards offending. Incorporated into Bandura's (1961/1977) scholarship, this approach stresses the impact of social interactions in the development of a person's delinquency. When the violation of a law becomes more favorable than leading an ideal lifestyle, surrounded by others who share values of retribution and anarchy, the result is a perpetuation of transgressive acts. This learning process does not deviate from other forms of education. It is the frequency and intensity of the person's exposure to the mindset of deviancy that also impacts their duration within the cycles of criminality.

Arguments that individuals can be independent, rational actors and could have alternate motivations to engage in violence (e.g., poverty, hunger, desperation) are excluded from Sutherland's (1939) work and remain lasting criticisms. Additionally, an acknowledgement towards the extensive impressions of external economic and governing processes must be considered when evaluating the presence of delinquency in modernity.

Developing contemporary conceptions of *social control theory*, Travis Hirschi (2001) proposes that all people operate off principles of self-interest. Although we are all inherently deviant, the impacts of inner and outer controls can influence someone's turn to criminal activity. Blending elements of positivism and ecological theories of violence, Hirschi (2001) highlights external factors influenced by governing policies (e.g., unemployment, poverty) and internal traits (e.g., personality disorders, delusion) that work simultaneously to encourage rebellious attitudes.

Hirschi's (2001) *social bond theory*, which has been empirically tested and supported throughout the past half-century, contends the importance of societal ties as a response to the conflicting convergences of inner and outer controls. If a person's moral code (including their social relationships, commitments, values, norms, and beliefs) is deeply invested into the flourishing of their wider community, they will be less likely to commit harmful acts. Non-profit organizations and societal initiatives geared towards the mentorship of delinquent youth are premised on this sociological perspective.

A culture and learning theory further stresses that the working-class realities of being overtasked foster a separation and isolation between mothers and their children (van Schaik & Burkart, 2011). The lack of female influences could cause youths to assert their social positions by turning to criminal actions, according to scholars under this

perspective. The absence of a positive parental influence allows for larger mediated trends, promoted in popular culture, to function as a pseudo-maternal authority. Of course, this position assumes that all parents are equipped with capabilities to effectively raise their children and does not explain for cases where children are raised in non-traditional households.

Informed by Edwin Lemert's (1951) concepts of *primary and secondary deviance*, where the latter accentuates the impacts of societal reactions on a person's identification of self, Howard Becker (1963) is credited with the development of the prominent *labeling theory*. This symbolic interactionist perspective is premised on the notion of stereotypes used towards the general classification of people. A self-fulfilling prophecy, it is contended that individuals turn to transgressive actions only once they are publically characterized as being perceivably deviant (Becker, 1963). Traditionally, the sporting of tattoos/body piercings, Docker boots, and/or leather jackets have served as markers towards public misconceptions and fueled fears (re: Stanley Cohen (1972) – to be discussed in following section) about the potential societal risks of certain bodies. Furthermore, the labeling perspective has also been identified as part of reintegration challenges for newly released inmates. Restrictions to securing employment and appropriate housing, establishing community bonds, and achieving a lasting sobriety are

all extended consequences to the incarceration machine. Once categorized by the State as an outlaw, it has become nearly impossible to escape societal markers of 'abnormal' and a 'menace'. Contrastingly, those who avoid these assigned and destructive labels should theoretically be less likely to contribute to rising crime rates. The opinions of others are vital towards forming one's lived reality under this labeling theory.

The above theories emphasize the impact that dominant societal ideologies and values can have on the misshaping of public perceptions towards the identification of deviant bodies.

2.3 Theorizing Serial Killers and the Media

Academic investigations of serial killers have largely focused on the typologies and structures of victimization associated with this group of transgressive bodies (see Haggerty, 2009). Working to define these violent acts and to track trends in characteristics (including physical, psychological, or social commonalities), fascinations with discovering the inner workings of these individuals has monopolized psychology, traditional criminology, and science research for decades. Leyton (2005) further identifies serial killers as the "symbolic mantle" that was once occupied by mythical creatures (e.g., monsters, vampires, zombies, etc.), placing a high importance on features of evil in our lived realities and in scholarship (p. 75).

An examination of the common characteristics affiliated with serial killers is not central to discussions in this dissertation, as it moves away from the focused objective. Maintaining key tenets of the cultural criminology field, it is the media's representation of these transgressors that must be critically evaluated. After all, the media industry is the primary medium in which the public receives information about violence and murder.

In *The Mythology of Crime and Criminal Justice*, Kappeler (1996) and his colleagues deconstruct the reporting and editing strategies of crime news and infotainment programming. Referring to the influence of the government and news agencies in the collection and presentation of crime data, the term *mythmakers* is used to emphasize these processes of media distortion (Kappeler et al., 1996). It is an individual's interpretation and perception that informs the creation of crime narratives within this propagated industry.

Through the refinement of technology mediums, these scholars confirm that the retention of serious and sensational crime stories can be reduced to the techniques of its construction. The reinforcement of stereotypes, management of information (including the date and time of publication), and the use of value-loaded terminology can all instantly shape social reactions and the newsworthiness of violence (Kappeler et al.,

1996). The employment of these techniques (among many others) works to create a conceptual framework towards understanding cultural values and societal priorities.

Peter Vronsky (2004) explores the evolution of a “serial killer epidemic”, starting in the 1970s and escalating into modernity (p. 23). In addition to increases in population size and the release of startling crime statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice in the early 1980s, it is the broad reporting of the news media that has worked to generate societal panic about serial killings (Vronsky, 2004). Sensationalized stories about serial killer profiles and violent crimes are repeated across media platforms to larger audiences. It is this repetition of reporting that fuels public intrigue on this topic and research in the cultural criminology field.

2:4 The Storming of Cultural Criminology

For centuries, theoretical and methodological considerations towards understanding occurrences of societal violence have been steeped in unidimensional perspectives associated to human behaviour (including a strong reliance on statistical-based research). Receiving extensive government funding and support from university ethics boards, traditional criminologists are often celebrated for producing objective appraisals of crime through a “fact factory” (Presdee, 2004, p. 276). Despite a societal dependence on numerical substantiation, these administrative criminology contributions

provide a snap-shot of criminological data with limited considerations for the larger societal impacts, trends, and functions of state apparatuses (Presdee, 2004). Ignoring the foreboding presence of multiple life worlds that exist in our late modernity, these orthodox approaches have highlighted the importance in the growing development of interdisciplinary scholarship within the Academy. There is a measureless need for criminological research that challenges tough-on-crime policies and the conservative values of the ruling elite.

The orientation of cultural criminology continues to develop as a forceful and dynamic scholarship towards the de-shackling of the traditional criminological consciousness and examining the persistence of crime in everyday life. Emerging in the mid-1990s through scholarly frustrations with fixed methodological and theoretical approaches to understanding crime, these interdisciplinary scholars draw on critical interactionist traditions, media and cultural studies, and qualitative methodologies towards evaluating the phenomenological experiences of crime occurring in late modernity. Implementing diverse research strategies, cultural criminologists actively seek multiple vantages to observe and interact with subjects. Human beings should not be scientifically and bureaucratically reduced to 'subjects' or 'problems' within academia (Wender, 2004).

CultCrim Progenitors

Frank Tannenbaum's (1938) work *Crime and the Community* remains one of the earliest statements towards contemporary notions of labeling theory. Motivated to further explore the compositions of youth culture, through a social constructionist criminology lens, Tannenbaum (1938) identifies a mainstream process of *tagging* juveniles as delinquents who associate with street gangs or stray from conventional behaviours. The impact of this societal judgement further encourages adolescents to engage in non-conforming transgressive acts, as a means of satisfying public expectations.

Imbedded with a larger concept of the *dramatization of evil*, Tannenbaum (1938) contends that labels of deviancy that are socially assigned to transgressive acts are subsequently transferred as permanent markers on the offending individual. No longer can the offender be viewed as a victim of their own circumstance. Tannenbaum (1938) stresses an accountability on adults to realize their significant influence on the self-conceptions of adolescents and to disengage from furthering generalized stereotypes related to race, class, or gender. This seminal research has stimulated further assessments on societal reactions and moral panics by noteworthy scholars including - Howard Becker (1963) and Stanley Cohen (1972).

Referenced within fields of criminology, sociology, and media studies, Stanley Cohen's (1972) interdisciplinary text *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* continues to surface in contemporary academic discussions. Based out of the London School of Economics in the United Kingdom, Cohen (1972) further accentuates links between public overreactions of crime and targeted groups through the *moral panic model*. It was determined that a severe disconnection exists between the social realities of crime (represented through news media and popular culture) and empirical rates of delinquency. A system of ideal values and preferred manners are sold to public through the dissemination of media narratives.

Societal Influencers

Defining the concept of moral panics as a collective overreaction to social problems, Cohen (1972) identifies several actors that fuel cycles of societal fears and mayhem: elected politicians, police officers, the media, and the public all work to influence communities towards economic gains and/or power.

Exclaiming *tough-on-crime* rhetoric for the punishment of transgressors, either through stricter gun laws or solitary confinement practices, politicians contribute to a streaming narrative about the questionable health of modern societies. Using communal discourse as a vehicle to advance agenda items and seek public approval, the conflicting views of political parties only serves as a point of confusion for all. The late Rob Ford's reign as the Mayor of Toronto from 2010-2014 is a prime example of an era filled with scandal, manipulation, and greed that overshadowed community-wide needs.

Completing the circuit of late night television programming (including personal visits with Ford) and highlighting domestic and international daily reporting, this media circus was obsessed with covering the Mayor's outlandish conduct and to secure higher ratings. Meanwhile, the people of Toronto were left in a state of confusion and desolation, as there was a lack of clarity and focus on key issues of health, education, finance etc. Once media narratives become consumed with the antics of politicians, the dissemination of important information to greater society is significantly limited. The American carnival of news reporting during the Trump campaign and Presidency is another example of this toxic and impressionable medium.

Police officers and other criminal justice workers are also actively striving to combat and lessen violence (on the streets, through technological mediums, and in conjunction with international partners) while concurrently relying on the ongoing presence of deviance for job security. The police declarations of increases in gun violence and gang activity over Summer 2018, that stirred grave concerns on issues of police protections within the city of Toronto, is a prime example of this claim.

Repeated news conferences and public debates moderated by Toronto Police Chief Mark Saunders and Mayor John Tory sparked mass panic towards for Torontonians' safety. Introducing their gun violence strategic plan, seeing an increase police presence within dangerous neighbourhoods during the hours of 7pm to 3am, these leaders steered the charge to completely eradicate the city's gang culture. Of course, the growing amounts of distrust towards the police amongst these communities is not addressed through the implementation of this plan. Shortly after the deployment of additional police, the public narrative surrounding Toronto's mounting gang violence began to lessen. A problem and solution perceivably produced by governing voices.

The media industry (either through digital platforms, radio, or print) are further identified as a prominent medium for fueling global and domestic fears. Whether it be the political rivalries of country leaders, the environmental deterioration of our planet, or the development and spreading of harmful diseases from underdeveloped areas, the media remains a powerful tool in shaping public consciousness. An authoritative credit is swiftly granted to those working in the journalistic field, regardless of their bias or incentivized motivations.

In Cohen's (1972) *moral panic model*, five types of people are identified as constant targets of panic narratives. Should a person be identified as meeting one of these categories, they will be subsequently labeled a societal transgressor on a public scale: 1) those engaging in anti-social behaviours 2) serious offenders (those committing violent acts towards women and children) 3) those who challenge political order and the organization of institutions 4) individuals whose personal style is camp, eccentric, or unconventional 5) those who do not follow *traditional* life pathways (e.g., family structure, education, legitimate employment).

Examining news coverage of two differing youth subcultures, the mods and rockers, in 1960-1970s Britain, Cohen (1972) identified the power of media stories in enhancing community perceptions about threats and violence. Sporting clean-cut outfits, listening to rhythm and blues music, and riding scooters the mod circle grew to gain

mainstream popularity over the coming decades. Contrastingly, rockers commonly sported pompadour hairstyles, distressed leather jackets, and listened to rock and roll music. Although the distinct styles and lifestyles of both groups did result in confrontations, these conflicts were no different than any other evening brawl or youth disagreement experienced in previous years (Cohen, 1972).

Branded as delinquent symbols, due to the media's dominance over the development of public perceptions, both mods and rockers subcultural groups grew to become the source of blame for larger social problems. Crimes committed beyond inner-city boundaries or where an offender had already been captured by the police were consequently labeled as a direct result of this ongoing youth conflict. Issues relating to teenage pregnancy, school disobedience, or substance abuse were also deemed a result of the mod/rocker conflict. Note: the news media only serves as an outlet to detail instances of crime and insight moral panics, as no solution is ever generated from their reporting.

Cohen's (1972) scholarship further contends the purpose of the media as a global funnel to relay and reinforce accepted values of society. Selecting specific stories and formatting summary narratives to report, the press dictates issues of critical importance for consumers. Outlined in his moral panic model, Cohen (1972) describes a *deviancy*

amplification process (to be further reviewed in *Chapter Four*) that ensues when a person/group challenges social norms. Often occurring during periods of change within a community, this process insists on public acknowledgements and reactions (from all different societal influencers discussed above) towards addressing the outlaw performance. Adolescents have remained the prominent target for criminal responsibility into the modern era.

Themes of youth delinquency and class systems are additionally prominent in the work of American criminologist, Albert K. Cohen (1955). Studying under Robert Merton and Edwin Sutherland, Cohen's *general theory of subcultures* contends that an individual's reduced access to conventional means to achieve an 'acceptable social status' impacts their perceptions of success and failure. Thus, those who engage in violence are consciously subscribing to an inversion of public expectations, where delinquent status is celebrated amongst certain social circles. The formation of gang culture is argued to be a direct result of the class divisions and ascribed values prominent in late modernity. Experiencing a status frustration, Cohen's (1955) celebrated text *Delinquent Boys* argues the incessant use of a middle class measuring rod on the conducts of working class men to preserve dominant mainstream values and the stratification of economic differences.

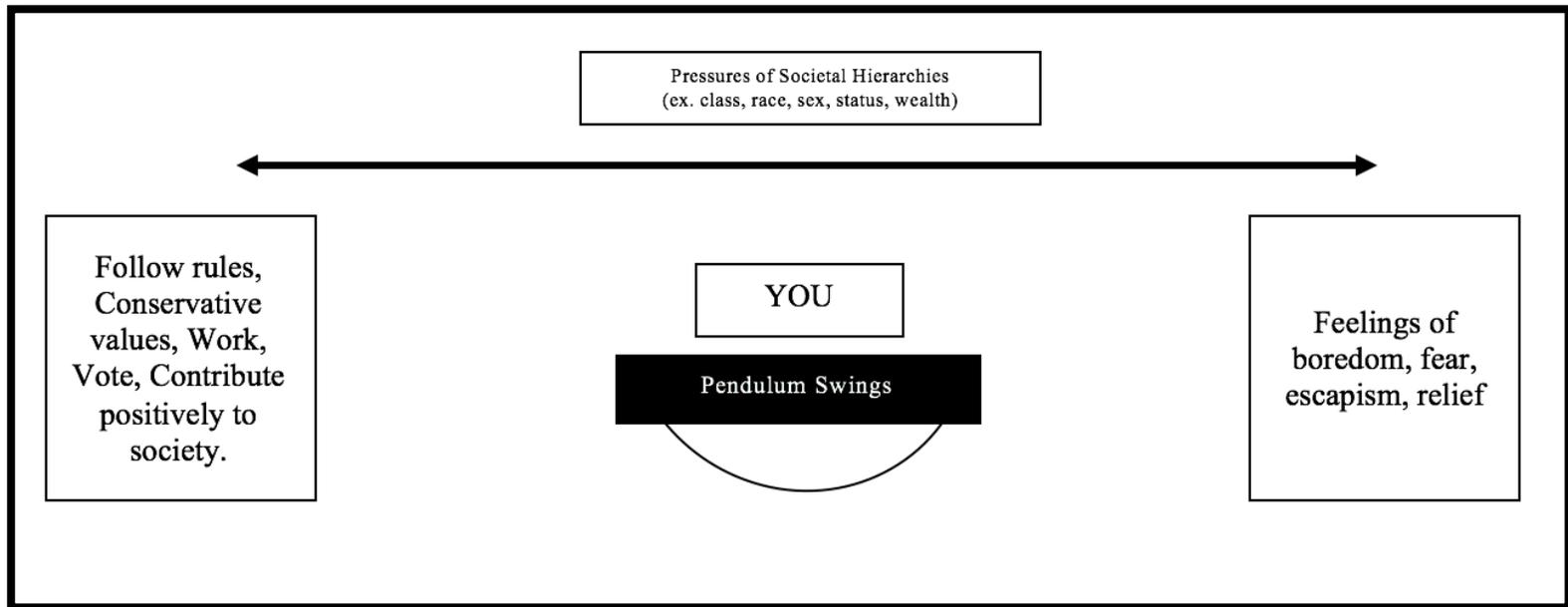
Further influenced by Sutherland's (1939) *differential association theory* and work on youth delinquency, Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza's (1957) *neutralization perspective* emphasizes a person's ability to offset traditional values and attitudes of society. The temporary disregard of any public accountability allows individuals to swiftly drift between deviant and orthodox conducts. Using justifications and denials of responsibilities, many delinquents under this perspective never acknowledge the full extent and impacts of their crimes. Like Becker (1963) and Cohen's (1972) labeling theory manifestation, Sykes and Matza's (1957) proposed argument further examines the impacts of societal expectations, class culture, and capitalism on the perpetuation of youth crime.

The "Ideal Personhood" Expectation

Contributing to the throws of capitalism resides a persistent clashing of hegemonic power, including prescribed values, between the ruling elite and the *subaltern classes* (Gramsci, 1971). Influencing consumption patterns, media-centered pressures are deeply embedded within the socialization practices of contemporary communities. "We must fall in line with the political and economic ideas of our nation, to reap the rewards of security and prosperity" – the unwritten code continuously sold to us.

As a cultural criminologist, I work to situate my own crime analyses within a *spectrum of modern behaviour (Figure One)* that is designed to highlight the contradictions of late-modernism. For example, the gendered expectations of womanhood within Canada fluctuates from mediated presentations of hyper-sexuality and boldness towards distinctive (passive) labels of nurturer and caretaker. We are confronted daily with images, stereotypes, and bureaucratic boundaries that fracture our self-representations depending on audience and setting. Within this patriarchal system, women are encouraged to compare experiences and adapt to all of society's contrived expectancies. Building on Goffman's (1956) concept on the *presentation of self*, where the individual does not have an authentic identity but conforms to all lived relations through the sporting of differing personas (or masks), in modernity we function as manipulated vessels for narratives of the elite and powerful to control. Those who stray away from societal standards, either through criminality or non-traditional choices, are isolated and commonly labeled as *deviant*. Our identities are eventually fully formed through the choice and perceptions of others.

Figure One – Spectrum of Modern Behaviour



Our societal and cultural institutions are further designed to emphasize diversions from accepted actions and norms. The desire for *ideal personhood* should be a never-ending pursuit within all sectors of public life (e.g., school, work, community, relationship, recreation etc.) and must remain a priority within our developed nation. David Garland's (2001) concept of the *culture of control* emphasizes this domination on retributive and shifting policies towards maintaining neoconservative governing principles in industrialized societies. The unfixed nature of late modernity, with increasing precariousness of employment and a fluctuating economy, encourages a reactionary and punitive approach towards any moments of rebellion. We live in a society negotiated by

intransigent politicians and motivations of wealth. The reverberations of shifting institutions and social restrictions is echoed in the development of transgressive representations.

CultCrim Emerging

The intellectual tradition of critical criminology, focused on challenging conventional understandings of violence and crime, serves as an overarching umbrella for progressive researchers with common goals in connecting with the public through diverse methods (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2012). Most notably, the crimes of the elite and powerful, present in a culture of control (Garland, 2001), are deemed accessible for academic criticism and exposition. This theoretical position also works to uncover falsities and embellishments prominent within the criminal justice field. The institution of global conferences, including the initiation of the 1968 National Deviance Conference in the United Kingdom, have offered a political and radical agenda towards garnering intellectual support for un-orthodox researchers of crime (Mooney, 2012). Instigated by seven British criminologists: Stanley Cohen, Jock Young, Paul Rock, Ian Taylor, Mary Susan McIntosh, Kit Carson and David Downes, who were frustrated by the persistent confines of classical criminological thought emitted at the Third National Conference of Teaching and Research on Criminology at the University of Cambridge and beyond, an exclusive

platform was developed to relay diverging opinions on societal deviance. These scholars worked to create a communal forum to complete dynamic research, debate non-traditional theories, and become “flâneurs” of the transgressive world (Presdee, 2004, p. 278). This forum persisted with great enthusiasm due to growing interdisciplinary support.

Eventually, to allow for more independent research, the conference meetings of this new assembly were scheduled less frequently and eventually ceased approaching the early 1980s. A recent revival of the National Deviancy Conference was held at the University of York (2011) and Teesside University (2014) to grant contemporary space for cultural criminologists to explore crime narratives and elements of capitalism without hesitation.

The 1964 initiation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, a research locale at the University of Birmingham-England, also provided a designated platform for scholars to develop the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies. Influenced by the academic approaches of feminism, (post)structuralism, Marxism, critical race theory, and sociology, the Centre encouraged inclusive and innovative scholarship that pushed past set boundaries of class, gender, and ethnicity. Elements of audience consumption, political hegemony, and cultural awareness were celebrated amongst this researching

group (University of Birmingham, 2020). Working alongside fellow sociologists, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, this Birmingham School of Cultural Studies was marked by the leadership and ideas of Stuart Hall. The *active audience theory*, embracing and encoding and decoding framework, argues the vigorous practice by which producers construct meaning in texts and consumers assign their interpretations to representations (Hall, 1973). This progressive perspective continues to reverberate within contemporary cultural arguments.

A response to Stanley Cohen's (1988) plea for criminologists to develop a politically and structurally informed version of *labeling theory*, cultural criminology strives to examine the meaning of everyday life that emerges from cultural and criminal events. This political endeavor is complex, as images and subcultures are accessible for evaluation through multiple mediums (e.g., Social media, movies, music, video games, YouTube, comic books etc.). The hyper-real process of cultural production that continues to magnify with the development of technological creativities plays a substantial role in the *machinery of boredom* present in contemporary society (Ferrell, 2004). As Mike Presdee (2000) articulately states: "We need a criminology that can comment on how culture kills. The death by dancing or death by media can and does happen" (p. 11).

Cultural criminology is founded on the work of a few key British and North American researchers who redesigned the boundaries of methodological exploration and the development of interdisciplinary concepts. In *American Skinheads: The Criminology and Control of Hate Crime*, Mark Hamm (1993) blends an ethnographic method with an analysis of hate core music to provide a historical specificity towards the emergence of the Skinhead Nation. Theories of hate, supremacist terrorism, and psychological profiles of these group members were further supported by interviews conducted by Hamm (1993). For the Indiana State University professor, this publication began an extensive career of research on the manifestation of terroristic activities within different subcultures throughout America.

Challenging critiques of producing mundane and extraneous research (O'Brien, 2005), cultural criminology argues for the recognition of the multi-layered presence of transgressions and pleasures within our modern media and communities. The implementation of ethnographic research methods, including the collection of detailed and personal accounts, reveals a multilayered and imbedded approach towards accessing restricted populations. Jeff Ferrell, a leading criminologist currently based out of Texas Christian University, has embraced this dynamic method of field work as the most effective way to fully comprehend human nature. Asserting the importance of a

criminological verstehen within research, Ferrell (1998) encourages scholars to make a commitment to naturalism and employ an empathetic understanding towards the greater societal factors that impact a person's delinquency. Referencing Weber's (1978) call for an *interpretive understanding*, Ferrell (1999, p. 400) applies this investigative awareness in his own ethnographic pursuits – including the studying of graffiti artists in Denver, Colorado. A culmination of four years of field work, Ferrell's (1995) piece *Urban Graffiti: Crime, Control, and Resistance* offers a macro-level critique of segregation and gentrification found in urban environments (including a survey of other American and European cities) and assesses the efforts of tagging artists to undermine political and legal agents through vibrant graphics.

Ferrell has continued to produce noteworthy scholarship that serves to outline and reaffirm the importance of cultural criminological research within our modern era. Publishing extensively on ethnographic approaches to studying crime, see *Ethnography at the Edge: Crime, Deviance and Field* - coedited with Mark Hamm, Ferrell (1998) insists on the opportunities of field work to foster the public greater accessibility, beyond a statistical report, to the lived realities of other beings. An approach exercised in the methodological development of this project.

Jock Young's (posthumous) academic voice remains a loud critic of the quantitative bias of the criminological profession. Strongly influenced by C. Wright Mill's (1959) *sociological imagination*, an empowering tool that calls for public awareness towards the interplay between the self and the social world, Young (2011) argues that crime scholars have become increasingly more enamored with *abstract empiricism*. Writing in *The Criminological Imagination* (2011), Young contends that crime scholarship maintains a blissful ignorance towards the effectiveness of empirical-based methodologies. Young (2011) does not suggest the entire eradication of quantitative research, but does appeal for an in-depth appraisal of all methods used to assess crime. The development of this liquid ethnographic study is a creative response to this appeal.

Working along with Keith Hayward, a cultural criminologist based out of Copenhagen University in Denmark, Young and Ferrell published a comprehensive account of the formation of this dynamic crime perspective (Ferrell, Hayward & Young, 2008). *Cultural Criminology* serves as a contemporary guide for scholars to appreciate the methodological diversity and apply progressive critiques of violence in an everyday setting. This text is often introduced in undergraduate studies of crime and sociology (Ferrell, Hayward & Young, 2008).

Lastly, the burgeoning field of cultural criminology achieved global credibility through the ethnographic and biographical work of the late British sociologist - Mike Presdee. Focusing his research on examining the enhanced criminalization and public control of society's youth, Presdee (1994) shines a light on the convergence of capitalism, culture, and crime in our modern world. Challenging classist and traditional views of evaluating violence from positions of privilege, this innovative scholar actively pursues and validates the importance for a phenomenological lens in academia. Presdee's (2000) text *Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime* serves as the unwavering foundation to all contemporary scholarship within this reflexive criminological field.

2.5: Presdee's Carnival

The topic of crime continues to magnify as a universal language that ignites controversial opinions globally. Considering the varying religious, geographic, and cultural perspectives that exist across the world, approaches to apprehension and punishment remain diverse markers of difference. Moving beyond the recording of statistics or dissection of government practices, cultural criminology is fueled by the necessity to identify larger structural patterns of justice and power. A Mark Wahlberg biographical film recounting military/policing heroes (see *Lone Survivor*, 2014 and *Patriot's Day*, 2016) or the documentation of prisoners' lives inside overcrowded American institutions on

Netflix (see *Jailbirds*, 2019 and *Inside the World's Toughest Prisons* 2018) does not solely function as a piece of captivating art, but further emphasizes societal hierarchies and restrictive freedoms. These representations utilize *carnivalized* elements of thrill and entertainment to create consumable formulas for all audiences.

The complete saturation of violent narratives and imagery has filled daily lulls and imaginations within our developed world. The passive observance of these productions is one intriguing feature of *the carnival*, a central tenet to the study of cultural criminology. Serving as the theoretical nucleus for this illimitable research approach, Mike Presdee's (2000) *carnival* is a confrontational and progressive model, influenced by the philosophical advances of Mikhail Bakhtin, towards evaluating violence and transgressions.

Born in the late nineteenth century, Bakhtin (1984) grew to become a prominent Russian literary theorist and philosopher whose scholarship continues to challenge Western thinking on themes of cultural history, linguistics, and aesthetics (the study of beauty and taste). Introducing the term *carnivalesque*, as both a literary pattern and a distinct historical phenomenon, Bakhtin (1984) examines the momentary liberation from influences of the Church and State during periods of community celebration. Bakhtin's (1984) intrigue by the grand carnivals held in Medieval Europe serves as an originator for

the identification of a controlled anarchic-relief that occurs during public revelry. During these merriment occasions, societal expectations of control and obedience are temporarily silenced and a spirit of total freedom overcomes the body.

According to Bakhtin (1984), the concept of *carnavalesque* also translates into literary approaches that stress the incorporation of the imaginative and exaggerated in storytelling practices. The greatest examples of carnivalesque effects appear in the use of comic violence, satire, bad language, or the shapeshifting of characters towards embracing moments of the obscene. The author is granted complete creative license when adopting this carnivalesque writing method. A technique argued to be adopted by contemporary news reporters in this project.

Over time, Bakhtin's (1984) exploration of political dynamics, elitism, and capitalism have translated in to modern insinuations of relief and festivity that are reproduced through television programming, college subcultures, annual holidays, sporting events, and vacations. The June 17, 2019 *Raptors Victory Parade*, attracting approximately two million people to the downtown Toronto core for a celebration clinching the *Larry O'Brien Trophy*, is a hyper-example of the modern carnival experience. We continue to actively scan our societal landscape for moments of reprieve from our calculated and controlled existence.

Referencing the Bakhtin's carnival theory, Presdee (2000) situates the body within a temporal moment of excess and grotesqueness. Considering the annual celebrations of overindulgence associate with the *Feast of Foods* (prior to Lent) or with Caribbean festivals (e.g., *Crop Over* in Barbados and *Carnival* in Trinidad and Tobago), the later serving as a site of consumerist greed, participating bodies are encouraged to abandon any structure and momentarily suspend their responsibilities. We gorge on the confrontational images of dominance produced and offered through the media. "Modern media has brought a sense of the 'dramatic' to everyday life" (Presdee, 2000, p. 76).

The increase of production and commodification seen in late modernity has only accelerated the storming of cultural criminology within the academy. Note: *Carnival of Crime* (1962), a drama/mystery film shot in Brazil, is an exemplary of Presdee's (2000) concept of pleasure and escapism. Strategically edited to emphasize and overt moral lens, where the over-sexualization and rebellious actions of a woman ultimately leads to her death, elements of risk, excitement, and audience-distancing are all key features of this media carnival. Scenes of chase and violence, amongst the backdrop of indulging carnival celebrations, work to transport the viewer into a temporary escapism from lives realities and fears (*Carnival of Crime*, 1962)

Presdee's (2000) seminal concept of *the carnival* must be further evaluated through panoptic lenses of pleasure and technology, to fully assess intersections of deviancy and consumerism within our modern era.

The definition of *acceptable violence* within our society is transformative based on the exercised medium, interpretation, and profitability of the transgression. The expanding empires of the World Wrestling Empire (WWE) and the action and horror genres of the film industry are a few of many businesses that depend on narratives of demolition and fighting order to attract viewership. The formulaic production of these representations appeals to the thrills of spectatorships, including direct humiliation, of bodies placed in moments of danger. Furthermore, the diverse accessibility of violent imagery, now sold through varying media platforms, works to desensitize the public to scenes of destruction and pain. Presdee (2000) expertly maintains: "In its consumption, violence is simplified and reduced to a trivial act of instant enjoyment; it thereby becomes no different from, say, the eating of a chocolate biscuit or the drinking of a can of Coke" (p. 65).

As viewers continue to purchase speciality channel packages or tickets to events premised on destruction and exhibitions of power, societal agents actively work to assert a definite regulation towards the constitution of violence and illegality. In Canada, the

police, political agencies, and courts are tasked with the delineating and enforcement of acceptable societal behaviours by individuals. Dominant ideologies, centered on tough-on-crime perspectives and notions of justice, are repeatedly exercised through the operations of the criminal justice system. Adhering to twelve identified news structures and values, outlined by Yvonne Jewkes (2015), crime reporting strategically frames stories of transgression and rebellion to match ideological lines. The nourishment of moral panics and inflated theories of subcultural groups are magnified through the repeating implementation of embellished reporting tactics (Cohen, 1972). Jewkes (2015) further contends the manufactured recounts displayed through news outlets should be acknowledged as a prism that works to negotiate and distort elements from the real world. As violent civilian acts are broadcast as violations of societal order, the spectacles of transgressive behaviours (found primarily on screen) are repeatedly celebrated for their entertainment value. The ongoing promotion of such events deliberately encourages viewers to consume violent programming, so long as they do not absorb such disruptive behaviour.

The "Panoptic" Gaze

Tom Wolfe's (1967) discussion of porno-violence and the transposable roles of the camera and viewer is arguably rooted in the profound work of the French social theorist

and philosopher-Michel Foucault. Serving as the subject of Foucault's (1975/1995) discussion on punishment and discipline within society, the *panopticon prison model* (credited to social reformer and philosopher – Jeremy Bentham, mid 1700s) is developed as a circular structure with a central single-man watchtower. The individual cells are located around the perimeter of the facility. This strategic institutional design obliges prisoners to moderate their behaviours towards the unceasing potential of being endlessly surveyed. The inmates are no longer able to camouflage amongst large crowds of boisterous activities. The anonymous power associated with the elevated positioning of the correctional officers produces heightened levels of paranoia and alarm within an already precarious environment (Foucault, 1975/1995). *Leaving no zone of shade* for the achievement of disruptive conducts, the panoptic structure also serves as a prevalent concept in the examination of gender and social performances (Foucault, 1975/1995).

The malleable application of the panopticon concept (within multiple fields of analysis) works to consider how elements of power and surveillance within contemporary modernity are reproduced through media initiatives. The relations between the camera and subject, producer and selected narratives, viewer and representation, or the elite and subjects are all corrupted by powered motivations of greed and control. As bell hooks (1992) exclaims: "Years later, reading Michel Foucault, I thought again about these

connections, about the ways power as domination reproduces itself in different locations employing similar apparatuses, strategies and mechanisms of control” (p. 115). For fiscal reassurances, the surveillance of violence through print and visual mediums depends on the carnivalesque displays of the human body.

Modern Monotony

Embedded within the process of *carnivalization* is a transitory freedom that alleviates consumers from toxic relations and routines of boredom ritualized in our contemporary culture. The self-immersion into various video/computer realms, the spectating of organized sporting events, or the purchasing of new accessories/clothing (often outside of our earned means) encourages a moment of rebellion and relief from societal expectations. Advances in technology now enable these crime feasts to be celebrated in large numbers or in secluded spaces. The market has assumed great control over the subjects of late modernity.

The consumption of transgressive images and narratives into a phase of *the second life* serves as an accessible and immediate escape for audiences to surrender to their imaginations and desires (Presdee, 2000). Without any critical analysis of the manipulative capabilities linked to the media industry, it is perceived that broadcast representations function as a safe third party for the consumer. Identified as a

transformative space tailored with entertainment narratives and alluring characters for your specific enjoyment.

Examining the development of cultural enterprises, inspired by human interactions and power relations, this contemporary criminological approach firmly critiques the element of selectivity in production. A framing process is initiated when representations of crime are disseminated across open forums. This manipulative feature of the media industry is represented in still imagery such as photography (see Carney, 2010; Ferrell & Van de Voorde, 2010), public billboards (see Muzzatti, 2010), newspaper publications (see Jones & Wardle, 2010), and art (see Cunneen, 2010). Although an image has the power to ignite multiple interpretations, it is the dynamic cycle between the viewer–society–media that fuels our burgeoning research.

In *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1944) identify the controlling and disciplining elements of the culture industry, where every man (sic) becomes an interchangeable copy of their neighbor.

These critical theorists point to the conspicuous production and extensive financial investments used to inject a perceived value in the acquiring and consumption of promoted goods (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944). Although certain products serve as potential ornaments for our constructed identities (e.g., Make-up, designer clothing) or

are mass-produced regardless of anticipated bodily harm (e.g., Alcohol, cigarettes), we are compelled to participate in any commodification process that promises a brief (albeit temporary) reprieve from our monotonous routines of responsibility. The engrossment in worlds of online computer games and social media presences also serve as creative platforms for people to experiment with their self-identities.

Muzzatti and Smith (2018) further investigate these inflictions of late modern capitalism through the popular and diverse formats of fortune telling services. Situating the public practice of seeking supernatural advisement in the center of the carnevellesque media industry, it is argued that the growing precariousness of work and institutional instabilities within late modernity have ignited a societal panic towards securing any future certainty (Muzzatti & Smith, 2018). People are actively searching for any assurances (accurate or not) to hinge their upcoming plans. Shifting away from the hiring as an upper-class party trick, spiritual practices can now be easily downloaded through phone Apps – appealing to the immediate demands of the working class.

Consuming Pleasure

The glorification of food, through diverse advertisements and film images, has fostered an entire sector of public following towards the visual consumption of various cuisines. The dripping frames of melted cheese on a hamburger, the hot steam swirling

from a freshly brewed coffee, or the chocolate glaze drizzled on a Boston Cream donut all work to initiate sensations of pleasure and desire for the viewer. Contemporarily termed *food-porn*, much academic and public attention has been devoted to the analysis of these strategic media campaigns and the competitive motivations towards capturing consumers.

Like the transportability of food, pornography can also be consumed within diverse environments (public or otherwise). Playing within boundaries of censorship and performance, visual pornography has often challenged the ethical compasses of society. The use of multiple bodies, themes, and position work to fuel a billion-dollar industry dependent on the public need for pleasure. The celebrated performance artist, Annie Sprinkle, has capitalized on this very element of gratification.

Annie Sprinkle's entry into the pornography world occurred in 1975 with the release of the film *Teenage Deviate*. Since that time, Sprinkle (1997) has built an empire as a performance artist and sex educator. With the creation of acts such as the *Public Cervix Announcement*, where she uses a flashlight and spectrum to show her cervix to the audience, and *Tit Painting* exhibitions, Sprinkle (1997) has often defied the traditional boundaries between art, pornography, and education. Compared to the renowned pieces of art, including Michelangelo's *David* and *God Creates Adam* scene from the

Sistine Chapel (painted between 1508-1512), and magazine advertisements featuring Kim Kardashian's revealing torso, Sprinkle (1997) also uses her body to attract consumers and earn an income.

Sprinkle (1997) identifies herself as a *metamorphosexual*, someone who is in a state of sexual flux and possesses a polysexual desire for all genders. The desires are overtly present in her popular film *Linda/Les and Annie* (1992) where Sprinkle engages in sexual acts with Les, a female-to-male trans-sexual (sic). To Sprinkle, gender should not be looked at as two separate categories but rather as a fluidity that is constantly changing. Artists cannot be limited to one gender or sexual category as we are continuously evolving beings, a position regularly debated by Sprinkle's critics.

The sensory attraction to violence also offers a (temporary) release from personal anxieties and creates communities of loyal consumers, like the above-mentioned forms of porn. Often recycling the same narratives of destruction and neutralization, transgressive images never cease to solicit public excitement. The production of violence thrives on the dynamic incorporation of thrilling scenes and daring aggressions of physical dominance towards the formation of alternate realities.

A renowned magazine journalist at *Esquire* - Tom Wolfe (1967) first wrote about the term *porno-violence* in a fifty-two-year-old publication. Focusing his piece on the

shocking headlines published on the front pages of *The Enquirer* weekly newspaper, Wolfe (1967) articulates a growing public fascination with narratives of horror and violence. The detailed tags of *Teenager Twists Off Corpse's Head...To Get Gold Teeth* and *Kills Son and Feeds Corpse to Pigs* are incorporated into his argument to awaken public consciousness for cravings of the grotesque. Wolfe (1967) details the intimacy of violent stories, where the camera-angle and viewer are interchangeable beings, functioning as the addictive hook for mass audiences. Our previous consumption of violent imagery only serves to heighten our imaginative lens towards newer representations and fuels our transgressive dependency. Violent predictors, such as the sounds of eerie piano keys or the dark shadows produced by dimly lit hallways, remain permanent and expected elements of transgressive narratives. The booming horror film industry, premised on recycled storylines of fear and destruction, is a testament to this claim.

In addition to entering the sphere of *the second life*, individuals turn to consuming representations of violence as an exercise to shape and enhance their perceived identities (Presdee, 2000). Through transgressive narratives, including the expanding realm of reality-crime programming, viewers are encouraged to participate in the chase and apprehension of wanted fugitives or confrontational interrogations of offenders. We momentarily assume the roles of the crime fighter heroine, rebellious youth, or the

outspoken defense attorney through storylines centered on elements of justice and retribution. The popular docu-reality program *Dog the Bounty Hunter*, airing from 2005-2012 on the A&E Network, exemplifies elements of accessibility and reality that are essential to the success of crime programming. Capturing unpolished footage of the cast's hunting of fleeing offenders, including the use of mounted cameras in all pursuit vehicles, the viewer is granted (a perceived) unedited entry into an exciting and captivating world. A familiarity between the audience member and the program's cast is also established through the insertion of individual interviews and the capturing of memorable family events.

The commodification of violence through media representations relies on an apparent replication of the everyday life. The viewer can fully submerge themselves and seek a pleasurable release from their habitual boredom, if produced narratives strategically depict believable stories of transgression. Moments of humiliation and public degradation, as commonly witnessed through *MTV's Ridiculousness* (2011-present) and *ABC's The Bachelor/The Bachelorette* franchise (2002-present), are dependent on the everyday disgraces of guests and participants to amplify the amusement of audiences.

The repeated dramatization and recounting of infamous murder cases and trials also rely on the elements of humiliation and veracity to produce appealing and high-rating representations. Interestingly, there appears to be an emerging societal obsession with the re-examination of high-profile cases of murder. Over the past two years, investigative documentaries continue to survey the evidences of the O.J. Simpson trial (see *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story*, 2016), the Laci Peterson murder (see *The Murder of Laci Peterson*, 2017), and the crime of the Menendez Brothers (see *Law & Order True Crime: The Menendez Brothers*). Even the Canadian crime-documentary *Bad Blood* (2017), reveals the plights of Montreal mob boss, Vito Rizzuto.

Further to the encouragement for individuals to adopt an alternate identity for a temporary viewing period, the element of pleasure exists within transgressive representations without any attachments to feelings of shame. As the viewer rarely has a personal relationship with the depicted figure, moments of punishment on screen hold no responsibility. Note: that not all crime representations are filled with instances of pleasure. Narratives that highlight moments of physical pain (e.g., the tumultuous journey of a drug user) can be framed as a learning guide for the spectator and are still identified as accepted viewer outlets.

In addition to the media-fueled carnivals, it is imperative to identify the everyday acts that are commoditized into sites of pleasure and rebellion. The organization of (formal or unauthorized) of raves and bar parties, the racing of stolen cars and motorcycles, internet bondage sites, and even the initiation processes affiliated with some fraternity/sorority organizations all encompass characteristics of liberation and excitement. The ongoing existence of these transgressive sites can link directly to societal needs for escape and the power of consumerist cycles within our modern world. Regardless of the pain or suffering, someone is profiting from these desperate cries for exhilaration.

Technology and Capitalism

The incessant development of various technological mediums works to secure elements of accessibility and greed associated with the carnival of crime (Presdee, 2000). In modern society, individuals can actively partake in transgressive narratives through their cellphones, tablets, televisions, computers, watches, and even by downloading from an assortment of streaming Apps. This multitude of technological channels offers the viewer the opportunity to readily access representations outside of the traditional television-room setting and encourage the private consumption of violence. The isolation feature of technology allows moments for pleasure and performance, occupied by a

spectator of transgressive accounts, to be pardoned from greater societal judgements. Now consumers of crime narratives can discreetly surrender to their cravings for images of felonious destruction. As Presdee (2000) states: "Desire becomes the engine that drives us to seek out certain cultural acts whilst the resulting pleasure drives our desire once again to find new limits" (p.5).

The commodification of violence flourishes through the unrestricted surveillance of isolated and/or unapproachable subcultural groups. Crossing structural and social barriers, advancements in technological systems also allows for the exposure of various practices within the criminal justice system. Capturing prison facilities and their inmates, the investigative strategies of the Drug Enforcement Administration (based in the United States of America), and the patrolling responses of rural police officers, portable technologies have expanded the scope of media documentation and the selectivity of representations for the viewer.

Within our socially-fragmented and instable world, moderated through global trade practices and the machineries of mass culture, individuals are also consistently motivated by fear. We turn to consumption as an exercise to display our self-control and social status. Our oblivious consumption of the most recent pair of *Air Jordan* running shoes or the new *I-Phone X* appears to be an exercised choice in expenditure, however;

we have been pre-programmed to assume this consumerist role. Although the carnival of crime emphasizes the commodification of violence and transgression within our contemporary world, the initiation of discussions on the pressures of commercialism is encouraged through Presdee's (2000) contribution. Through our modern realities of instability and anxiety, we are propelled to chase carnivals at all expense.

Cultural criminology is called to focus on the broader global and political economies of labor, profit, and communications to identify moments of power and fear pervading our modern world (Cunneen & Stubbs, 2004). The increasing development of regulations and uncertainty surrounding notions of employment, health, wealth etc. are endlessly mixed to form a "destructive cocktail of capitalism" (Presdee, 2000, p. 85). A toxic dysphagia that ceases to subside.

A continued strength of this field lies heavily in the acknowledgement of historical dissentions and hegemonic power structures that remain omnipresent amongst modern communities (re: Gramsci, 1971; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944). Through these moments, the sensationalized images of crime can be fully dissected as products of public manipulation and hyper-capitalism. Focusing on the functions of larger social institutions, such as our workforce, education, and family structures, cultural criminologists emphasize the interconnectedness of life-spheres. The choices in both narrative and

image production witnessed in transgressive representations along with the diverse opportunities of consumer interpretations speaks to the complex processes of performance within modernity.

Note: The rapid development of technology has also encouraged the emergence of citizen-journalism across a variety of media platforms. The capturing of police apprehensions on cellphones or the live-streaming of protests through personal social media sites all work to grant temporary power to the surveyor. These narratives do not always result in policy or institutional changes and are regularly adopted by mainstream media to substantiate their own narratives. Notions of traditional surveillance are temporarily disrupted and resisted through the manipulation of technology users. Themes of unrestricted power and consumption are further expounded in *Chapter Five* where the podcast medium.

Intersectionality of CultCrim

The analytic value of cultural criminology does not solely rely on the rebellious attitudes of modern transgressive researchers but flourishes due to the transecting pulls from diverse disciplines. As instances of crime are dynamic, multi-layered occurrences, it is contended that any investigations into contemporary violence should include

considerations from across several institutional departments. The experiences and perspectives infused through the fields of gender and cultural studies, communications, political economy, sociology, philosophy, and film mediums etc. are essential towards the development of complex and energetic crime publications. The study of criminology continues to strengthen through the infusion of diverse knowledge.

The storming of this new criminological perspective has fostered the production of varied international research that works to capture the multiplicities of violence and orientations of power present in modernity. Ranging from the evaluation of cultural and political forces that serve to legitimize and glorify the initiation of war (see Colaguori, 2012, Klein, 2012) to the global considerations for the generation and reification of terrorism ideologies (see Jenkins, 2003; Hamm, 2004; Rothe & Muzzatti, 2004) – the field of study widens the cultural umbrella towards the inclusion of dynamic interdisciplinary topics.

The carnival of crime remains a relevant and essential model towards the research of cultural criminologists, as elements of violence, performance/pleasure, and technology converge to form a thrilling transgressive space. The isolated evaluation of these parts works to further critique the intersections of the media industry with the tightly controlled and monitored consumerist world.

2.6 Crime and Reality – McArthur Madness

The mediums for news consumption have multiplied in accessibility and real-time currency over the past decade. The weekday routines of paperboys (typically occupied by young adolescents living in suburban neighbourhoods) delivering printed newspapers has now been instantly replaced with the diversity of social media platforms, digital publishing, and podcast recordings. Amidst these opportunities for content production and imagery, scenes of violence and transgression continue to overwhelm our modern media landscape and audiences.

Resembling the spectacle-like representations of celebrity trials (e.g., O.J. Simpson (1995) and Michael Jackson (2005)), the Bruce McArthur case confronted Toronto residents (and greater Canadian communities) with the impression that glamorized storylines of sex, manipulation, and control are not exclusive to Hollywood. Produced narratives about this serial murderer contributed to a societal showcase that thrived on public fears and police contentions. These narratives are drenched with political condemnations that speak to the fissures within our criminal justice system and beyond.

Producing research that solely identifies quantitative amounts of word usage or framing techniques would serve as a numerical summary towards very little contemporary change. The employment of a cultural criminological approach

necessitates considerations for the political, economic, and historical circumstances surrounding transgressive representations in the sample under review. Directly impacting the LGBTQ2 community within Toronto (and beyond), this serial case evokes public discourses on issues of equality, power, and response within our governing landscape. Although we live in a society premised on unity and equal treatment, our practice is consumed with moments of isolation and neglect.

A cultural criminological approach to examining the non-traditional elements of the McArthur case, through stereotypical mediated depictions, emphasizes modern intersections of justice, fear, and control.

Methodological Diversity

My continued commitment towards the field of cultural criminology is fueled by the opportunities for self-discovery and adaptability with the development of research methodologies. Although a set outline is necessary for ethical and measurable pursuits (e.g., data collection and coding formulas), the importance for researching outside of any boundaries is strongly encouraged. As an interdisciplinary scholar, my investigations are enhanced by creative approaches and dynamic arguments that are malleable to varying cultural and economic conditions. The strengths of this project are found in the

intersections of a liquid ethnographic exploration and systematic analysis of the news media.

“If traditional criminology mistakes textual dullness and robot like social actors for objectivity cultural criminology zooms in on the phenomenal experience of crime, victimization and punishment, stressing anger, humiliation, exuberance, excitement and fear. It reveals the energy of everyday lie whether in the transgressive breaking of rules or in repressive nature of conformity and boredom.”

(Hayward & Young, 2010, p. 108)

Framing Crime: Analyzing Toronto's Print Narratives of a Murderer

Chapter Three

"If feminist deconstructive writing has long held the place of writing as the endless displacement of meaning, then visual culture provides the visual articulation of the continuous displacement of meaning in the field of vision and the visible."

(Irit Rogoff, 1998, p. 15)

For the people of Toronto (and beyond), the presence of serial killers has remained a prominent and satiating subject of popular media channels. Returning from a busy day at work or searching for a weekend binge-worthy program, the consumption of mediated narratives depicting the lives and crimes of violent murderers has become a pastime endeavor for consumer populations. An intrigue to (briefly) enter the mindset of an infamous criminal, work to decode challenging cases, and to detect possible warning signs commonly linked to societal psychopaths are satisfied through the powers of spectatorship. It is this reciprocal relationship and resonance between the representation and audience that fuels the entertainment industry and serves to reinforce institutional stereotypes.

The comforts of viewership were permanently shattered in 2017, as posters for missing men were plastered throughout The Village community of Toronto. The launching of *Project Houston* (2012) and *Project Prism* (2017), a police initiation for the tracking and anticipated apprehension of a serial murder, also challenged perceptions of

public safety during this time. No longer could the stories of violent teens and sex-crazed adults, repeatedly depicted through investigative documentaries or Hollywood-inspired revivals, serve as a hyper-reality presented solely on our screens. Suddenly, the dissemination of knowledge became the powered currency of public fears. Torontonians were faced with our very own societal demon.

Traditional criminological research projects would expectedly approach the McArthur case as an opportunity to either: 1) determine statistical patterns of apprehension and incapacitation of victims for the later identification of dangerous city areas, 2) evaluate police response procedures for missing persons (with specific focus on the lives of minority peoples), or 3) seek to develop a list of societal predictors towards influencing public policy and perceptions on the development of dangerous offenders in late modernity. These substantial investigations would serve to inform readers of the varied challenges existing within our criminal justice system and the presence of violence within urban settings. Consequently, it is the element of *awareness* (and its multidimensional considerations) that is glaringly missing from these above projects, as a leading lens for which to evaluate the McArthur case. Through a liquid ethnographic approach, analysis of the news media's coverage of a Toronto serial killer is essential

towards understanding how crime continues to be manipulated into a mass-market pleasure.

The critical examination of printed images and narratives continues to develop into a dimensional and reflexive field. The *visual event* emphasizes a complex relationship between the framed story and the consumer, where commodification processes and preferred aesthetic values are embedded within each publication (Mirzoeff, 1999). Transmissions of popular political and social perspectives are established through shocking headlines, selective imagery, and leading content. The public is subjected to biased, and often embellished, recounts of daily events and tragedies.

Although media and film scholars have devoted decades of critical analysis towards the propagation of produced representations, my goal as a cultural criminologist is to further examine the intersections of consumerism, power, and manipulation present in transgressive frames and to translate this information for the larger public. Not only should audiences be aware of larger social problems persisting in our world, but it is imperative that a consciousness for how information is selected and relayed be exercised by all.

The realm of spectatorship remains an unceasing cycle of influence and consumption. The media produces a freeing high for audiences to temporarily suspend

their lived realities. Visual codes and prescribed lifestyles function as the foundation for the incessant development of all television genres. These stereotypes become familiar labels used to evaluate the outside world. Influencing the function of social institutions and community relations, the selected words and images disseminated through our media channels have tremendous power on our lived behaviours. Irit Rogoff (1998), a theorist and curator researching from Goldsmiths University of London, articulates the influence of aesthetic values and codes in the constitution of popular meanings. The visual field remains an inhabited space where culture is continuously shaped and reproduced (Rogoff, 1998).

The process of spectatorship is forever evolving through the development of technology and the repeated documentation of previous historical events. Rogoff (1998) identifies three components of the visual field, focusing on the reception of representations, that are prevalent in different formats for each consumer:

- 1) The availability of varying viewing technologies, through transportable devices, encourages an unrelenting consumption of mediated narratives by audiences. The offering of free WIFI connections within larger business establishments, the opportunities to (illegally) download content from pirate sources, and the uploading of popular television series to non-restricted websites by larger networks all contribute to a highly

accessible platform that enables unlimited observing. As new technologies increasingly develop in our modern society, the breeding ground for media narratives also continues to swell. Through the production of Apps and recognition software (e.g., Google's *Home Personal Assistant* and Amazon's *Echo*) our daily routines, filled with lengthy commutes and ongoing familial commitments, are forever accompanied by selective and edited narratives. This interactive familiarity serves to instantly saturate moments of silence and boredom for the consumer. Additionally, this era of diverse social media platforms, that allows for the instant transmission of data, has further enhanced the scope of the visual field in our modernity.

2) The (re-)claiming of certain images, stereotypes, and narratives by cultural producers and television genres has also shifted the landscape of the visual arena (Rogoff, 1998).

The *CSI effect*, a term first expressed by District Attorney Andrew Thomas on the rising rates of wrongful acquittals in Maricopa County (Arizona), is now a consequence associated with the incessant repetition of popular images and narratives depicted in crime television series (Shelton, Kim & Barak, 2006). The use of high-tech strategies for the collection and dissection of criminal evidence, central to programs such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000-2015), is now an expected procedure that shapes the viewer's perception on the functions of the criminal justice system. This embellished perspective

only serves to immobilize audiences from exploring true realities of societal transgressions.

3) Elements of pleasure and desire are central to Rogoff's (1998) third component of the visual field. As viewers, we are prominent decision makers in the development and ongoing production of cultural images and narratives. If there is no receiving market to consume these representations, executives will cease funding of various projects. We are drawn (either actively or subconsciously) to programming that soothes our anxieties, challenges our curiosities, stimulates our emotions, satisfies our intrigues, and suspends our realities. Whether we are consuming a routine series, watching a television news channel, or reading a new publication, a thread of emotional curiosity bounds us to unremitting cycles of the visual and dictates our next point of spectatorship.

Additionally, Nick Couldry (2003) offers the term *media rituals* to detail practices of surveillance, perceptions, and power within modern media institutions. The public broadcast of images and narratives, through varying mediums, serves to reinforce popular ideas and viewpoints held by society's elite. Employing a neo-Durkheimian perspective, Couldry (2003) emphasizes the influence that mediated representations have towards the organization of social life. An element of 'togetherness' is evoked in contemporary audiences. Acknowledging the multiple interpretations of the word *rituals*,

it is the unrelenting pull and comfort associated with spectatorship that is emphasized in this case.

Where traditional criminological researchers are obliged to follow strict quantitative guidelines to complete their investigations, Rogoff (1998) insists on an intersectionality between notions of technology, history, and pleasure on a boundless plain of visual cultures. The shifting elements of consumerism, and power relations in our late modernity only furthers the need for critical scholarship on the framing and societal impacts of produced representations.

Combined with elements of surveillance, an understanding of visual culture must return to notions of *the gaze*. Building on the work of Jacques Lacan (1977) and John Berger's (1973) *Ways of Seeing*, conceptions of the gaze have shaped meaning productions and consumer interpretations for decades. In *the gaze*, the voyeuristic pleasures or pains associated with the consumption of representations is often perceived as an isolated practice. An authoritative process is granted to the anonymous position of the observer. John Walker and Sarah Chaplin (1997) further contend that "no act of looking is innocent" (p.109), where a multiplicity of connotations and implications exist within a text. While interpretations of the gaze vary across feminist and political perspectives, the observer continues to partake in a complex routine of dependence.

Laura Mulvey (1989), a British feminist film theorist, conveys: “The spectator is absorbed into a voyeuristic situation within the screen scene and diegesis, which parodies his own in the cinema” (p. 23). Commanding an unrelenting public gaze on inflamed storylines involving politics, policing, and lifestyle, the McArthur case has functioned a consistent headlining narrative within the Toronto mediascape.

This research project, and implications further discussed in *Chapter Four*, is encouraged by bell hooks’ (1992) concept of the *oppositional gaze*. Identified as a form of political rebellion and the reclaiming of agency by black bodies, hooks (1992) grants the subject of critical dissection an authoritative position within the viewing transaction. Larger social problems related to issues of race and sexuality, with focus on the vulnerabilities associated with certain cultural and sexual preferences in this heteronormative and divided world, are granted interrogation and importance through this powerful perspective.

3.1: A Malleable Methodology

As previously emphasized in *Chapter Two*, the field of cultural criminology continues to thrive as a space for researchers to practice integrative and non-conventional approaches towards evaluating societal transgressions. Moving criminological research towards an engagement with elements of fluidity in modern life,

it is the liquid interplay (the boundless considerations) between the researcher and subject that is encouraged. Ferrell (2013) further contests that situated meanings and moments of symbolism can be retrieved by the researcher fully submersing their body within a subculture under review.

Promoting an interdisciplinary approach toward the examination of images and adhering to ethical expectations of a content analysis methodology, my integration of reflexive ethnographic testimony offers a space for the injection of applicable theoretical perspectives. Drawing on Presdee's (2000) articulation of the transgressive pleasures (associated with the consumption of crime representations) and Linda Williams' (1991) concept of *body genre* (to identify scenes of entertainment and glamourized violence promoted to the public), the acknowledgement of liquid ethnographic traditions does not solely reproduce personal critiques of visual pieces. Rather than simply identifying the framing and editing techniques, the cultural constructions of meaning associated with the production of news stories are reviewed. Jeff Ferrell (2013) contends: "In a world where the meaning of crime increasingly emerges from media dynamics and televisual communication, forms of *visual ethnography* or *ethnographic content analysis* may best situate the researchers inside these cultural processes" (p. 265). The success of this

research materializes in the total utilization of investigation, activism, and reflexivity of the reviewed sample.

Serving as a prominent research guide throughout my graduate studies, Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldbberg (2009) outline the application of reflexive methodologies through a variety of research traditions. Comprising of careful interpretations and reflections, these business-minded scholars are insistent on the evaluator's development of a resonance with the object of study (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). The researcher must establish impressions of meaning and bond with the texts under review. My positionality as a female scholar and privileged, heterosexual body are acknowledged in the development and interpretation of the collected analysis. It is through the interdisciplinary field of cultural criminology, one that encourages diversity and multiple understandings of crime, that an awareness for varying social and cultural experiences is developed. The insertion of Jeff Ferrell's (1998) influence of a *criminological Verstehen*, for achieving an empathetic understanding of crime and the associated significances of transgressive acts, is further compatible with this reflexive research strategy and is prominent within the following liquid ethnographic evaluations. The adequacy of visual culture and content analysis (as an accepted methodology) is achieved through attention to the multi-dimensional positions of viewers and reviewed objects.

3.2: The Present Study

Primary and Secondary Sources

A grounded theory approach, using inductive reasoning, is the root of the analytical strategy for this project. This research tool and concept encourages the investigator to seek out and conceptualize social patterns and structures through processes of comparison. With limited qualitative influence, this study is focused strictly on considerations of reporting on the Bruce McArthur case and larger implications of the news media in modernity. Due to common societal considerations that printed sources are more precise and seen to be vetted sources of information sharing (see Muzzatti & Featherstone, 2007), the publishing of newspaper articles over the 2018 calendar year (January to December) are selected for this analysis. Public accessibility and daily (sometimes hourly) publishing of these stories are also factors considered within this chosen media sample. These publications are retrievable by the public across different technological mediums and are specifically sourced online for this project.

All circulated within the city of Toronto, with some feeding news to national publications, the selected sources reflect a diversity in political perspectives and consumer audiences. Regarded as prominent agenda-setting sources, *The Toronto Sun*, *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail* represent a range of journalistic opinions and

writing styles towards reporting everyday events. The three publications serve as primary sources to the project, due to the exorbitant amounts of coverage dedicated to the McArthur investigation.

Modeled after British tabloid journalism, *The Toronto Sun* newspaper emerged in 1971 from the termination of the *Toronto Telegram* publication. *Postmedia Network Canada Corporation*, founded in 2010, is the current publishing house for this paper. This conservative-based circulation is premised on the production of shock-based materials with controversial headlines and full page images. Woven through an abundance of car, lottery, and food advertisements, the written content is often concise to deliver readers a quick update on current events. The inclusion of a *Sunshine Girl*, a sexualized image of a Toronto resident, is located at the back of the publication for immediate and disposable viewing pleasure. The paper is currently run by Adrienne Batra (Editor-in-Chief), a previous Communications Director for former Mayor Rob Ford's campaign. It should be noted, that Ford also represented the Conservative party of Canada during his municipal reign (The Toronto Sun, 2019).

Characterized as a broadsheet publication, due to the lengthy paper style used to imprint news, *The Toronto Star* was initiated in 1892 by two future Mayors of Toronto – Horatio Clarence Hocken and Jimmy Simpson. Over time, the paper's ownership

continued to circulate amongst political hands with the acquiring by Sir William Mackenzie, Joseph E. Atkinson and Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Additional political patrons and business men, including Senator George Cox, William Mulock, Peter Charles Larkin and Timothy Eaton, also lent their support to the ongoing development of this liberal publication. The newspaper is currently produced by *Torstar Corporation*, a publisher formed to specifically support this expansive medium (The Toronto Star, 2020).

Producing a variety of content-rich sections, *The Toronto Star* identifies its focus on principles of social justice and civil liberties. The paper has endorsed the Liberal Party of Canada through multiple levels of government, as a measure towards supporting public values of minority rights, organized labor, and nationhood. The paper can be acquired through a subscription service or online for a gradual fee. Notions of greater accessibility, related to circulation and legibility, are criticisms associated with this publication (The Toronto Star, 2020).

Regarded by some Canadians as the newspaper of record, *The Globe and Mail* is a national publication founded in 1844 by George Brown (to later become a Father of Confederation in Canada). Committed to igniting public discussions on business, news, politics, investing, and lifestyle, this circulation is targeted to the liberal business

professional and attracts 6.5 million weekly readers as of 2017 (The Globe and Mail, 2020).

Interestingly, the paper is currently owned by *The Woodbridge Company Limited*, a holding company that is a controlling shareholder of the multinational media firm - *Thomas Reuters*. Considered a prominent influencer within the global oligopoly of information sharing, *Thomas Reuters* continues to acquire companies developing computer and tax software, conducting electronic and foreign exchange trades, and legal knowledge and scholarly outlets. Narratives and data produced through this circulation becomes an authoritative voice throughout the modern world (The Globe and Mail, 2020).

A critical content analysis of newspaper publications relating to the McArthur investigation would be incomplete without the inclusion of alternative sources that are the central voice for equity-seeking communities. To further evaluate and appreciate challenges surrounding police powers and the capitalization of murders, the secondary sources of *NOW Toronto* and *Daily Xtra* are critical to ensuring a reflexive assessment of data. Note: cultural specific papers were intentionally excluded from this sample, due to limited coverage on the McArthur case.

A free publication for Toronto residents, *NOW Toronto* is an alternative weekly that employs edgy topics and graphics to relay essential news stories to readers. Drawing on stylistic trends used in tabloid journalism, elements of shock and confrontation are infused in each circulation. The first issue was published in 1981 and has since developed comprehensive guides on issues of sex, food, and festivals consumable throughout the city. Once based out of a Church Street location, the paper remains an ally of marginalized communities (NOW Toronto, 2019).

Covering current events and news-related content through a LGBTQ2 lens, the *Daily Xtra* publication calls for inclusivity and a public recognition for all peoples. Stories of racial diversity and class divisions are significantly discussed on this dynamic platform. Furthermore, this paper dedicates publication space towards documenting historical tensions and discriminations experienced by all minority peoples. Issues relating to missing Indigenous women, the recounting of the Stonewall Inn Riots, and religious condemnations surrounding sexual preferences and gender identities are a few examples to this end. The *Daily Xtra* issues are published by Pink Triangle Press, a pioneer of independent LGBTQ2 media groups, and is aligned with the mission of the paper – “daring together to set love free” (Daily Xtra, 2019).

Search Terms

The collection of articles consisted of a two-step process, to ensure the complete capture of McArthur-related publications during the designated timeframe. Initial surveys on direct websites for all five selected sources, through use of designated keywords, proved to identify popular articles related to the subject matter. Search terms included: “serial killer”, “fear”, “dismemberment”, “landscaper”, “flower pots”, “sexuality”, “gay village”, “homicide investigation”, “age”, “police practices”, “gay village murders”, “race and murder”, “privileged murderer”, “Church Street killer”, “panic”, and most effectively “McArthur”. Articles located through this primary search were downloaded and stored in Zotero, an open-source reference management software site. Previous research experience using this tool highlighted the efficiency in labeling, categorizing, and inputting of links into an accessible database. This strategy served to establish a base to the article collection process.

The second phase of data retrieval consulted with *Factiva*, an international news databased produced by Dow Jones (a leading source in business and financial information). Access through Ryerson University’s Library website fostered an extensive search for all articles published by the five selected sources during the 2018 calendar year. A cross-comparison of entries was initiated against the initial *Zotero* database to

identify missing publications. The additional articles were further downloaded and added to the *Zotero* file.

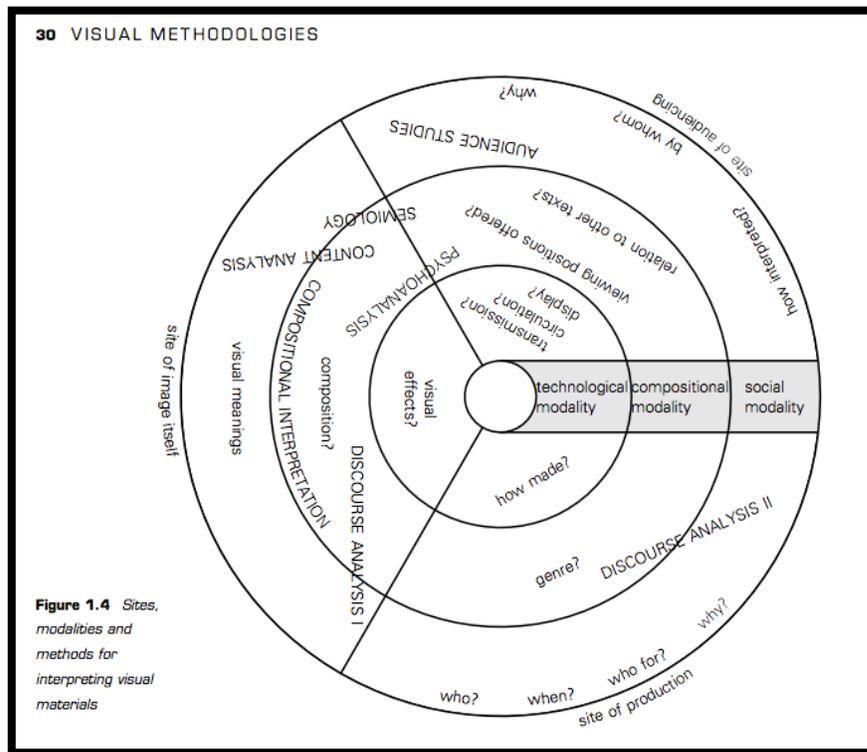
The repetition of article content with different headlines (under one publication) proved to be an initial challenge to this research initiative. An independent review of each article was conducted to ensure content was directly related to the McArthur investigation and to eliminate any recurring publications. To establish a measurable scope for this analysis, stories that mentioned the McArthur case strictly through a link to another article or provided a chronological recounting of all crimes committed in the city of Toronto (including the McArthur victimizations) were removed from the master list of articles. The total number of articles retrieved was 365. *The Toronto Sun* – 69 articles, *The Toronto Star* – 207 articles, *The Globe and Mail* – 65 articles, *NOW Toronto* – 12 articles, *Daily Xtra* – 12 articles.

Coding the Visual Field

In *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, Gillian Rose (2001) outlines a critical visual methodology to be adopted by communication and film researchers. Focusing on how one interprets and appraises images, this cultural geographer emphasizes the importance for the politics of knowledge construction to be considered. Through the identification of three sites (production,

audienicing, and the image) and modalities (technological, compositional, and social), Rose's (2001) work provides a unique overview of different visual methodologies (See *Figure Two*). This empirical researcher actively strives to inject critical visual studies amongst the larger discussions of discourse and content analyses within the communications field.

Figure Two



Raymond Williams, a Welsh novelist and academic, is famously observed stating: "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (As cited in Walker & Chaplin, 1997, p. 7). Employed in an evaluative sense (re: economic capital or class) or about the human-made/tangible aspects of our environment, the term

culture embodies several polysemic interpretations. A subjective application of this concept (referring to how one perceived their social environment, norms, and institutional framework) is also developed through various socialization processes. Incorporating notable contributions of Stuart Hall (1997), Rose (2001) underscores the innumerable practices of meaning making that circulate amongst different groups in society. It is within this revelatory perspective that Rose (2001) offers the elements of a *mise-en-scène* and *montage* as tools towards the comprehensive review of images.

In outlining a compositional interpretation analysis towards examining visual culture, Rose (2001) emphasizes the importance for viewers to critically dissect elements of space and framing. In addition to the depicted subject, the selectivity of angles and focus by the producer should be reviewed by scholars. Using Mary Cassat's (1878) *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* painting, Rose (2001) encourages the development of the *good eye* through an examination of spatial organization. The positionality of bodies within an image work as a focalizer for the viewer where the spectator's identification with the visual can be strengthened or destabilize (Bal, 1991). This *mise-en-scène* strategy strives to elevate the observer from a strict position of spectatorship to an investigative role where displayed narratives and symbols are deciphered. Rose (2001) further stresses that

a dichotomy is exposed between the 'inside' presentation and the 'outside' interpretation of audiences through the assessment of spatial arrangement.

William Gamson (2004) uses the term *strategies* to describe the process of media framing where producers of images take advantage of discursive opportunities. The montage analytical-tool calls for the evaluation of editing practices as a means of interpreting the continuity of visual representations (Rose, 2001). The assemblage of routine narratives and popularized typecasts are not void of individual biases and preferences. Baldwin Van Gorp (2007) further articulates the boundlessness of agenda-setting analyses within the communication processes as meanings continue to manifest inside culture without individual intrusion. This social constructionist perspective emphasizes the concept of framing as both a tool and a process within media production (Van Gorp, 2007). Elements of selectivity and profitability continue to swell within our economic-centered world.

Gillian Rose's (2001) approach to conducting visual research draws on Robert Entman's (1993) illuminating concepts of *framing* and *salience*. Focusing on the power and communication of meaning produced within a text, Entman (1993) writes of a strategic process in the mind of the creator. Entman (1993) contends: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a

communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). The reception and interaction with narratives by audiences is an imperative element to Entman’s (1993) cultural evaluations. This insightful perspective remains central to the methodological planning of this project.

Incorporating elements of interpretation, framing, and emphasis, highlighted in Gillian Rose’s (2001) dissection of critical visual methodologies, the coding process for this project was reflexively initiated. A cultural criminology analysis of news production requires a micro-level analysis of content selection and placement in conjunction with macro assessments of political/social/economic implications for publication. To begin the coding process, four key categories were identified to encourage an analytical content review: Headlines, Images, Content, and Type. Working in conjunction, these four elements can immediately influence public opinions and offer embellished interpretations of worldly events. Consulting with media scholarship from other cultural criminologists, themes of significance and patterns in coverage can be critically explored through these four identified classifications.

In *Hindley’s Ghost: The Visual Construction of Maxine Carr*, Philip J. Jones and Claire Wardle (2010) use the British media’s previous labeling of Myra Hindley, an

infamous child murderer who acted between 1963 and 1965, as a 'lunatic' and 'monster' to inform their approach of reviewing media stories of Maxine Carr. Identified as an accomplice in Ian Huntley's (her lover) murder of two young schoolgirls in Cambridgeshire (England), Carr received a three-and-a-half-year prison sentence for providing a false alibi. Collecting samples from November 1, 2003 to December 31, 2003, Jones and Wardle (2010) focused their exploration on the page layouts of images and text. These commonly overlooked elements function as leading influencers for public opinions. Jones and Wardle (2010) contend: "...the way newspapers are able to use visuals to tell misleading stories has often been overlooked, both in terms of legal affairs, but also as a central area of interest within journalist studies" (p. 54).

Press photography and headlines work as primary openings for the transmitting of assumed public connotations and the re-assertion of societal codes. The choice of select words and images have the potential to immediately relay an enhanced significance that is not supported by journalistic evidence or police investigations. The combination of headlines and images in newspaper articles can convey snippets of selective information to spectating audiences. Furthering Jones and Wardle's (2010) emphasis on the visual, the repetition of key words inserted in article headlines and investigation pictures serves as the initial categories of content review.

The reader's decision to invest additional time to peruse an article's full contents also marks a prominent moment in spectatorship and news production. A curiosity for the writer's perspective, Jones and Wardle (2010) articulate a process of digestion and internalization associated with the audience's consumption of longer news stories. The framing of narratives, with the inclusion and omission of details, can be a secondary influencer for the spectator where opinions are further cemented. The reader develops a (perceived) expert status towards the selected topic that only serves to ignite passionate debates. It is left to the reader to decipher the accuracy and intent of each article. Thus, the content and categorical type of each sample article is further examined for legitimacy and perceived motivation.

Our contemporary society is inundated and dependent on the employment of symbols to relay collective meanings. The use of emotion icons (emojis) when communicating electronically, roadway signals to safely guide traffic, and non-smoking stickers to reflect establishment policies are a few leading examples on how directions are immediately conveyed to the public with minimum misinterpretations. Utilized across the globe, the body has become reliant on snippets of information (with little dispute) to inform daily practices. The shaping and influence of culture remains a central motivator towards this investigation into news reporting practices on the Bruce McArthur case.

Information is a powerful force that requires an awareness and interrogative mind to isolate and identify the truth.

“The ‘visual’ aspect of our world does not manifest itself uniquely in the visual media, but it actually pervades our daily lives in most of its facets: in looking, being looked at, visualizing, depicting (reproducing), etc.. So apart from becoming more integrated, the study of the visual and the study through and by the visual should become more ‘inclusive’ as well.”

(Pink, 2012, p. 253)

Research Findings: Trends and Themes

Chapter Four

“There is nothing left for the consumer to classify. Producers have done it for him.”

(Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944, p. 125)

Sitting in a crowded lecture hall in Fall 2012, I was first introduced to the dynamic theoretical underpinnings of the cultural criminology field. Confronted with mediated images of violence (through advertisements and films) and samples of non-traditional methodological projects (with emphasis on reflexive ethnographic approaches), my previous understandings of criminology, as a strict quantitative discipline, were challenged. The Professor dedicated his lectures to further examining the intersections of consumerism and transgressions in late modernity, with the frequent interjection of common metaphors and personal reflections. Most notably, the discussions on news production strategies, narrative formations, and the editing of representations sparked an intellectual curiosity for this young scholar to further explore.

Speaking to the idealized practices of incorporating news values (re: Jewkes, 2015), the Professor initiated an impactful reflection on the element of routine present in media development. Pacing around the classroom, the listening ears were asked: “How many of you watch the nightly news? The 6 o’clock or late night broadcasts?”, I raised my hand with intrigue towards the direction of the conversation. “Have you ever noticed

that the news always airs for one full-hour?”, he exclaimed from an elevated spot at the back of the classroom: “No matter how much news has actually occurred that day, the content of that program has to always fit a one-hour time slot.” It is such a simple concept of daily practice that is very rarely publically examined through a lens of production and embellishment. I was immediately captivated not by the content of media but by the selective choices exercised by its creators. A few questions began to percolate: *How can everyday occurrences be translated accurately for audiences? Can the media (either news reports or films) ever authentically capture moments of transgressions? What are the consequences of consuming mediated narratives within late modernity?* It is the discretionary powers and transmissions of journalistic bias that makes the news media a powerful and indestructible force.

The above queries remain prominent themes in my scholarship and have steered this research project towards analyzing journalistic strategies displayed in published articles related to the Bruce McArthur investigation. As such, two prominent themes have been identified as points of interrogation from the collected article sample: 1) The manipulation of societal fears and 2) Evaluating control – police vs. media.

4.1: Creating and Maintaining Fear

Notions of turmoil and destruction have served as longstanding markers of evolving civilizations. With changing eras, technologies, and laws, opportunities for producing chaos have continued to aggregate and intensify. The creation of global conflicts (including the promotion of wars and the monopolization of natural resources), the daily pendulums of international stock markets, sports strategies centered on opportunities for distraction and overtaking, and political campaigns working to secure every vote possible by any means are just a few examples of the currents of chaos that exist in our world. In all the above scenarios, somebody benefits from the instabilities and variables of everyday life.

The concept of societal chaos remains a ubiquitous threat that is simultaneously emphasized and challenged, with the help of the media and modern consumption patterns, to reaffirm preferred values and political views. Influenced by dominant ideological perspectives, that are elected and funded by taxpayers, conservatism is celebrated as a marker of uniformity. For example, tough-on-crime narratives that are founded on themes of punishment and accountability are most commonly expounded in governmental response to topics of gang violence, incarceration, and police practices. These go-to responses, exercised by varying societal institutions, remain popular and

unyielding throughout modern communities and are prominent in the sampled news coverage of the McArthur case.

The production of fear results in the overconsuming, overspending, and overworking of people in our modern world towards achieving any element of security. A living room camera device, that also dispenses treats, used to monitor your pet's every move or the utilization of the *Find My* support software to track people's *Apple* devices are daily strategies implemented by consumers to combat these lived anxieties. More recently, in Canada, the idea of implanting microchips in individuals, by companies and political parties, continues to grow in popularity. Endorsed by many futurists, this radio frequency technology is identified as a progressive tool for travel and consumption industries. Through these examples, structures of power differences are reinforced, between the observer and subject, and establish even more instability and panic in our current global climate.

The panopticon penal structure and social theory, subject of Michel Foucault's (1975/1995) *Discipline and Punish*, is a leading example of control and tracking practices that have translated across centuries. Designed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1843) as a circular structure with a central single-man watchtower, this strategic institutional layout forces prisoners to moderate their behaviours towards the

unceasing potential of being continuously surveyed (Foucault, 1975/1995). Commenting on the functions of tracking and the sovereign within society, Foucault (1975/1995) ascribes that the central watchtower has an anonymous power: “The panopticon is a marvelous machine which, whatever use one man wish to put it to, produces homogenous effects of power” (p.430). This seminal concept remains a prominent lens used for the evaluation of social institutions and governing practices in current sociological analysis. Public behaviour is uncompromisingly influenced by hierarchies of power and influence.

Our Societal Prison – Exploring the Panopticon

Contemporary prison environments remain a prominent space for the development and implementation of varying panoptic-style technologies. The consistent development of documentary representations on the lived realities of inmates, with the insertion of producers and cameras, have provided audiences with glimpses of an otherwise isolated arena. From the comforts of their devices, spectators are granted panoptic power through the lens. Elements of freedom and societal acceptance become comparable markers between the viewer and subject that further reinstates divisions in our communities. It is arguably the chaos associated with imprisonment practices (issues

of institutional violence, overcrowding, punishment, hierarchies, inmate-officer relations, etc.) that spark intrigue for the average consumer.

The setting of imprisonment is hyper-produced within the television and film mediums and further offers a sense of deceptive familiarity to the audience. These enhanced perceptions, also reinforced through music and literature, grant a (temporary) expert status for consumers to hinge their total understandings of penal structures. Public opinions and interpretations of the criminal justice system are alarmingly generated through the cyclical production of primetime drama representations and sensationalized docu-series. Commonly promoted as offering ‘an inside glimpse’ or ‘raw footage’ of the prisoner experience, these narratives are edited and framed for appeal to consumers. Furthermore, common stereotypes built on elements of class, politics, race, and gender are perilously reinforced to consuming minds. Most notably, the Netflix crazed following of *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2019) has secured high viewer ratings through the exploration (and exploitation) of these racial and gender stereotypes.

Researching and teaching issues related to modern imprisonment, discussions surrounding the concept of bodily consumption are prominently debated with my students. On a macro-level of analysis, the political and legal powers associated with the isolation of persons, as a means of retribution and later rehabilitation, should encourage

more immediate questioning. Decisions based on meritocracy, class, and opportunity (held by a small group of people) have lasting impacts on the functioning of our criminal justice systems and the perceived safety of our neighbourhoods. This practice of human isolation, by way of institutionalization, further serves as a conditioning tool for the free population to follow prescribed values and social codes.

The *ideal personhood* label, introduced in *Chapter Two*, is a regulated concept that has been operating within global civilizations for centuries. Adapting through changes in environment, resources, and laws, governed populations are firmly guided towards acceptable livelihoods through both subtle and overt strategies (including public shaming, fines, and deportation) that play on fears. Those who pay their taxes, contribute to a productive workforce, replicate traditional family structures, vote, follow government protocols, seek education, etc., are all adhering to preferred societal expectations. Although promotions of difference and individuality are celebrated through waves of media stories, the presence of modern technology and terroristic stereotypes have served to regulate many towards preferred identities of conservative personhood. Our cultural practices, values, and religious observances (re: the Quebec legislative ban on the sporting of face coverings by Muslim women) are now further interrogated through a politics of fear, where deviations can result in public isolation.

In cyclical format, those who abide by the acceptable notions of personhood described above are granted their freedom and an opportunity to further conform to societal principles.

On a micro-level, the prison institution fortifies the element of the unknown, as the environment is in constant flux and human behaviour (under strict confines) is unpredictable. With variances in classification practices, officer discretions, and threats of long-term isolation from families and friends, anxieties permeate on multiple levels. The inconsistencies with reintegration practices, including employment and public acceptance, are also significant unknowns within our criminal justice system.

Contrastingly, the true realities of prison can only be experienced by those who occupy the actual space. The institutional invasion of film crews and their produced interpretations cause a disruption to any authenticity of reporting. As representations often portray similar storylines of segregation, revolt, gang dynamics, and escapism, the variances between individual institutions are often overlooked. Additionally, unless the consumer has spent significant amounts of time in an isolated space with strict rules and constant threats of victimization, a true understanding of this environment is unachievable. This disconnect emphasizes the false realities often consumed through popular culture in comparison to the everyday lived experiences of different populations.

Current imprisonment practices serve as an insular example towards examining the interconnected elements of chaos, fear, power, and the unknown present in late modernity. These same forces are prominently displayed when reviewing the newspaper representations of the Bruce McArthur investigation. Minimal interpretations of these published narratives would argue that they represent the simple relaying of pertinent information about this infamous case. The use of key words and imagery all help to instantly translate a story to the non-suspecting reader. Only upon critical investigation can the larger patterns of elitist rule, monopolized by economic and political entities, be emphasized and thoroughly addressed.

Adhering to twelve identified news structures and values, outlined by Yvonne Jewkes (2015), crime reporting strategically frames stories of transgression and rebellion to match ideological standpoints. In this case, the fueling of moral panics about policing and community are magnified through the repeating implementation of embellished reporting tactics (Cohen, 1972). Journalistic discretion serves as the ultimate conveyor of opinion and ruling. Jewkes (2015) further contends the manufactured recounts displayed through news outlets should be acknowledged as a prism that works to negotiate and distort elements from the real world.

The Headlining Act

In the field of economics, *the headline effect* refers to the influence that negative news reports have on corporate transactions, investments, and other financial activity within the larger economy. These journalistic observations often focus on advertising blunders (e.g., 2017 – Pepsi commercial) or product malfunctions (e.g., 2013-2018 – faults with Samsung products). Damaging headlines and critical narratives can easily sway customers and investors away from putting their dollars behind a certain brand or product. Even though we are challenging societal values of ideal personhood, we are programmed to react on mass and turn to social media for additional public shaming.

Within communications research, the headline effect has remained a prominent element of critical assessment and psychological testing for decades. Based out of the *Institute of Communications Research* at the University of Illinois, Percy H. Tannenbaum (1953) identifies the headline of any journalistic article as the thumbnail sketch of the news where that the reader shops in search of an intriguing topic. This brief collection of words works to seduce readers and activate individual opinions instantaneously. Tannenbaum (1953) credits the condensed nature of the headline, with space limitations on the page, as a primary influencer in the shaping of this content.

This strategy continues to dominate the journalism industry and serves as a primary element of analysis for this project.

The motivations of news media, including the extended entertainment industry, are dynamic and often discreet in impact. Promoted as sources of news sharing, political underpinnings and goals of reader retention are greatly emphasized (and anticipated) with every post. With the dissemination of news articles through online platforms, the headline serves as click bait for the scanning reader and must include captivating words that quickly generate interests and opinions. For example, in the chosen sample of 365 articles (published from January to December 2018) the words “McArthur”, “Police,” and “Serial Killer” were the most commonly used across headlines (*See Table 1*). These labels/pins have become common tags for the public to reference all published narratives associated with this violent case.

Table 1 - Headline *Most Common* Key Words in Five Selected Publications, Jan – Dec 2018

Publications	Total Articles Published*	“McArthur”	“Police”**	“Serial Killer”
NOW Magazine	12	02	06	06
The Globe and Mail	65	37	32	23
The Toronto Star	207	85	73	31
The Toronto Sun	69	33	30	32
Xtra	12	09	02	02

*Total articles of sample broken down by source.

**Heading may also include Toronto Police Service (TPS).

Imbedded within fear production cycles of our media industry, there is a fixation with glorifying the infamous as a measure of social taunting and fascination. Functioning as both a condemnation of evil and a feeding point for public curiosities, the repetition of the terms “McArthur” and “Serial Killer” in titles could be interpreted as a provocative measure to emphasize the violent shift of an average man. The McArthur case continues to gain international publicity arguably due to the unpredictability and unconventional elements affiliated with the crimes of this older, closeted killer. Living a perceived ideal lifestyle, McArthur walked amongst us without suspicions for years and maintained successful employments. Defying traditional profiles of serial killers, including elements of reclusiveness and impulsiveness, this predator marks a changing shift in our societal narratives of murder. The combination of the terms “McArthur” and “Serial Killer” in the titles of the reviewed articles further lures readers with the controversial juxtaposition of the two terms, where an older, sociable community man is now identified as a violent murderer. The reiteration of these select key words acts as a daily reminder of the unpredictability of the modern criminal.

In addition to providing a point of reference to the reader, the noteworthy inclusion of “McArthur” in publication headlines has assigned an element of heightened intrigue and recognition to a name. Consider the public notoriety of the surnames

Manson, Bundy, Pickton, and Bernardo as predecessors to this mediated process. Years after the apprehensions and convictions of these predators, our society continues to actively search for opportunities to relive the emotions of fear and thrill closely associated with these cases, often searching for the name of the perpetrator. The incessant productions of investigative documentaries and mainstream films – including the new blockbuster film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019) which depicts a revisionist history of Hollywood in the 1960s, the Manson Family, and the murder of actress Sharon Tate – is one example of this mediated revisiting of serial killers that permeates our contemporary culture.

Put simply, words synonymous with death and killer have become sensationalized content within our transgressive world (See *Table 1* for identified repetitions of the term “Serial Killer” in subject newspaper headings). These seemingly newsworthy texts carry a salaciousness that appeals to pre-existing understandings of violence and the burgeoning curiosity of the reader. More specifically, the crime headline lures readers into a heightened state of manufactured fear – a strategy conveniently exercised by publications to attract readership and secure more funding through advertisements.

Most significantly, the noted exclusion of the word “Minority” among sample headlines speaks to glaring currents of racism and oppression that remain active in present society (See Table 2). The omission of coverage on issues of identity, shame, and resistance, so prominently marked by the McArthur case, is imperative to conversations about the modern media *carnival* (Presdee, 2000). The ongoing public disregard towards missing and murdered Indigenous women across our nation –a topic that only appears to gain political recognition during moments of re-election or mass anger – is another example of this process of selectivity affiliated with current news production.

Table 2 - Headline *Least Common* Key Words in Five Selected Publications, Jan – Dec 2018

Publications	Total Articles Published*	“Minority”	“Project Houston”	“Monster”
NOW Magazine	12	03	00	00
The Globe and Mail	65	00	00	00
The Toronto Star	207	00	01	00
The Toronto Sun	69	00	00	02
Xtra	12	01	01	00

*Total articles of sample broken down by source.

Richard J. Lundman’s (2003) research on the selection bias in the media industry emphasizes key trends in news production that are still employed today. Stories must have elements of “newsworthiness” and “novelty” to secure readership and appease

acceptable social perceptions (Lundman, 2003, pp. 359-361). This viewpoint acknowledges the journalistic discretions and negotiated interpretations involved in the development of news. Although not a novel criticism, it is this continuing process of selectivity that is directly responsible for the shaping of public understandings about crime and beyond. As Meyers (1997) further contends: "There are no hard-and-fast rules about what constitutes the news, and reporters and editors themselves are often vague about how they separate what to cover from what to ignore within the vast pool of occurrences that could, potentially be news" (p. 18). This cultural criminological analysis strives to hold the reporting industry accountable for practices of exclusion.

Newsworthy stories are easily categorized by journalists as exemplars of existing social structures, reinforcing common stereotypes and belief systems (Lundman, 2003). As issues of equality continue to echo throughout our contemporary society, repeatedly veiled behind popular rhetoric and everyday habits, the news media industry most often produces typified stories through "obvious templates" (Oliver & Meyers, 1999, p. 46). It is through the repetitive use of these set models (including a buzz-worthy headline, provocative image, and everyday rhetoric) and a prescribed newsworthiness label that a novelty of favoured viewpoints is identified by news outlets.

The positionality of different consuming bodies is critical to conversations of media representation and spectatorship. The opportunity of *the gaze* (Mulvey, 1989) is not granted to all consumers, where elements of social position (such as race and sexuality) automatically categorize individuals as only sites of commodification. Cultural stereotypes become the easiest and most familiar way, through media representations, to offer these bodies to mass consuming audiences - meeting little resistance.

Furthermore, one's elite status also grants an authoritative positionality where preferred representations can be framed for maximum social and financial benefit. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's (alleged) political interference with a criminal case against SNC-Lavalin and his subsequent re-election in 2019 is exemplary of the influence that absolute power can have on societal discourse. A form of resistance to Presdee's (2000) *carnival*, wealth and status are a continued influence in the shaping public narratives.

Malik and Fatah's (2019) discussion on the lack of diversity in Canadian newsrooms is also a critical point towards understanding the purposeful exclusion/minimal interaction with stories from marginalized communities. As humans, we are inherently drawn to consuming representations that hold a high stake and meaning in our daily lives (as introduced in *Chapter Three*). Our investments in social circles, television programs, and daily news are all subconsciously motivated by a

transactional exchange of pleasure. The *carnival of crime* remains an expanding force because of the consumer's extreme interest in violence and transgressions. The same concept can be evaluated of the news media's partiality and promotion of certain stories. If the same voices continue to select and formulate societal news, with minimal reflexivity in positionality and diversity, then audiences will only be presented with an insular and self-seeking outlook on the world. Malik and Fatah (2019) explore a corporatized world of journalistic enterprise and make a passionate call for the implementation of total inclusivity within this institution.

The Power of Imagery

The article sample depicted a wide range of images to support investigative narratives and lengthen discussions. A correlation between readership groups, class, and use of imagery, serves as a noticeable trend within this study. For example, articles from *The Toronto Sun* often featured 2-3 framed images per article. Ranging from 138 to 1530 total characters per piece, these articles included multiple images of Bruce McArthur, Toronto police investigations (predominantly displaying body retrievals at the Mallory Crescent location), and victim profiles. With the removal of mostly summary reporting, the reader can very easily identify the significance of each article through the visual images displayed. Functioning as a form of tabloid journalism, premised on the

manifestation of shock, this conservative publication targets the populist mindset.

Additionally, the articles are open for free access online, making consumption a very easy process.

Contrastingly, *The Globe and Mail* published 24 articles (from a total of 65) sans images. Producing editorial stories that included interviews with experts within the field of law and the criminal justice system, victim testimonies from previous criminal activities, and opinion pieces on contemporary policing practices, this publication relies on the written word (and loyal readership of business and educated professionals) to click and consume. Note: the extensive use of text by publications does not eliminate opportunities for media manipulation and narrative shaping.

Furthermore, 4 articles (from a total of 65 from *The Globe and Mail*) included an image of Bruce McArthur himself, serving to lure consumer attention to this exciting

Table 3 – Common Images Used in Five Selected Publications, Jan – Dec 2018

Publications	Total Articles Published*	“McArthur”**	“Victims”***	“Community”	“TPS”****
NOW Magazine	12	00	01	06	04
The Globe and Mail	65	04	08	07	19
The Toronto Star	207	39	37	13	68
The Toronto Sun	69	47	34	08	42
Xtra	12	00	05	04	03

**Total articles of sample broken down by source.

** Profile images of Bruce McArthur depicted.

*** Includes individual and collective images of eight victims.

****TPS – Toronto Police Service. Includes images of Toronto Police Chief Mark Saunders and the investigation.

narrative. Note: *NOW Magazine* and *Xtra* publications published 0 images of McArthur across their respective journalistic pieces, focusing primarily on elements of victimhood and community. Refer to *Table 3* for breakdown of common images represented in sample.

The conceptual and editorial choices to include images of McArthur, the eight victims, and members of the Toronto Police Service in published articles link to larger themes of identity affiliated with this case. Although not overtly discussed in overwhelming detail, a noteworthy point of these findings is a colonial-inspired narrative that is woven throughout these media interpretations.

Elements of exploitation, domination, and assimilation are prominent features of colonialist practice. Through periods of ascendancy, preferred ideas and identities have been mercilessly ascribed to vulnerable populations across the globe. The supremacy of certain bodies over others, manifested through tactics of corruption, violence, and eradication, have reinforced elitist beliefs and perceived ideal values. Premised on similar ideologies of fear and manipulation, all colonial efforts from previous decades to contemporary terroristic reigns have embossed everyday institutions within late modernity.

Building on the perspectives of Marshall McLuhan, *electronic colonialism* emphasizes the power of mass media in dominating and capturing the attention of millions of viewers (McPhail, 1987). Mimicking the domination of colonial institutions, McPhail (1987) highlights elements of control and impression as prominent features of multimedia networks that play on the human psyche. Living in a universal empire of the mind, produced cultural narratives have the power to instantaneously shape opinions, form bias, and discredit lived realities. The global development and takeover of larger technology companies (re: Google, Facebook, and Twitter) are culturally marked as leading predecessors in this new empire of information sharing and regulation.

The body's online presence has become an all-consuming pastime of manipulation and enhancement for the modern person. Many have turned to this electronic empire to influence the behaviours of others, secure capital, and dictate preferred opinions. For example, the hourly use of his online Twitter platform, to relay government decisions and enthusiastic rhetoric, is a common practice in Donald Trump's presidency. The ability to upload content and secure reaction instantaneously – even as a newsworthy publication – is the most dangerous element of this new colonialism.

The experiences of the colonized body have often served as an afterthought for advanced societies. Yes, elementary history classes may discuss moments of forced

assimilation, including the rule of global communist forces and the emergence of Canadian residential schools, but these narratives fail to remain central to political agendas and concerns of modern rule. A form of NIMBY-ism, the lack of personal attachment to these impactful events, does encourage public indifference. The prominence of McArthur imagery throughout the entire sample, including varying profile images of the killer as the leading picture, is argued as another moment for the domination of the white man. Images of the eight victims were commonly inserted in lower sections of the articles, forcing the reader to scroll down to retrieve this information.

The image sizes selected by journalists for the sample articles also factor into the disproportionate emphasis of the white man imagery. In many of the articles, the leading picture was an enlarged image of McArthur (regularly in a posed position across varying scenes (e.g., in Niagara Falls and as a Mall Santa)). The displaying of this body, as the initial viewpoint for the reader, serves to further inscribe a label of heightened importance. Contrastingly, images of the eight victims, often presented in a formatted cluster, were thumbnail in size. Mimicking the style of a traditional mug-shot, these pictures were cropped to emphasize the ethnicities of bodies victimized by McArthur.

The difference is comparable to the significance of a book's title versus the sub-line in a cover design.

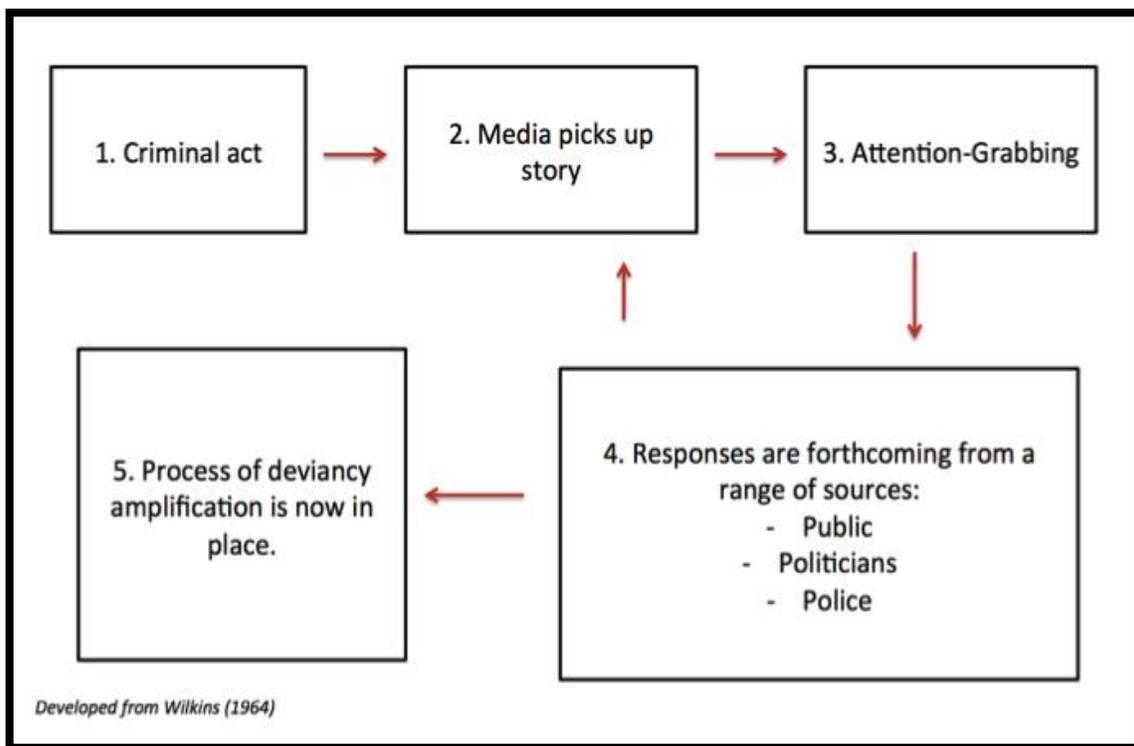
Reproduced in court drawings, this infamous killer has become a hallmark of crime-media over the past several months. Consider this: *Are you able to identify both by image and name the eight victims of this crime? Could you provide a detailed description of McArthur based on the information you have consumed?*

The element of ideal personhood and image/story production is also critical to this discussion of power. Embedded in colonial thought, the immigrant body is ritualistically othered or identified as a site of consumption. With most of his victims having migrated from South Asian or Middle Eastern countries, McArthur preyed on the isolation and naiveté of these men as they functioned in a foreign land. The complexities related to stories of immigration, sexuality, and acclamation are silenced amongst waves of public infatuation with serial killer profiling and issues of police practice. Should MacArthur's victim profile have consisted of sexually exploited, murdered, and dismembered Canadian-born white females, the media coverage on these bodies would no doubt have dominated airwaves. As such, discussions around the public's entranced *gaze* on narratives of crime and bodily consumption are key to this McArthur analysis.

4.2: More Dangerous? Police Control or Media Discretions

The *deviancy amplification spiral*, used by Jewkes, 2015, (See *Figure Three*) is a conceptual approach to examining the emergence of moral panics and feared transgressions in our developed world. This step-by-step process begins with the occurrence of a crime that is unique in circumstance and often relates to ongoing social problems. For example, a car crash that occurs in a Wal-Mart parking lot between two rushing customers is commonly identified as an everyday incident and very rarely picked up by media outlets. If we were to add more dynamic elements (e.g., the driver of one vehicle was an underage child or under the influence of marijuana), then the story adopts *spectacle characteristics* (Surette, 2015) that simultaneously heighten public fears and feed curious minds with instances of societal violence. This cyclical approach highlights the power of mediated narratives in dictating the responses and practices of larger social bodies.

Figure Three



As depicted above, the media industry enters the deviancy amplification process early on as an influencer of public consciousness and dictator of consumption routines. Setting the broader narrative for acceptable interpretations of larger social issues, the media initiates a visceral reaction from other social institutions. Essentially, the media operates as the agenda-setting model to which police and government bodies are tethered. Should these societal bodies not respond to mediated narratives (in a timely manner), public confidence would be in jeopardy of deterioration. This cyclical reaction

works to reinforce the influential ability of the news media industry over the governance of our criminal justice system.

Relentlessly reporting on the mounting fears of gun violence in the city, fluctuating periods of police hiring, and outrage surrounding carding practices, the news media has actively strived to reinforce an us versus them framework between the public and police agencies. Hiding in plain sight, media shapers continuously work to streamline public aggravations and expressions of blame onto other social agencies with limited acknowledgement of their impact on public consciousness. Through oligopolistic ownership patterns, this takeover occurs through the deployment of several strategies that allow for journalistic opinions to instantly translate to the public.

Representing Policing

Mediated images of police activities are developed through varying formats and production genres to reach mass audiences. Cartoons, YouTube series, prime-time television, and reality shows are amongst the differing categories that work to represent police culture. These channels and accompanying narratives become the primary reference point for many regarding the function and behaviours of police officers in our modern society. Not only are these representations easy to consume, requiring little

originality, they have also become generational stories that we experience throughout our lives.

Adapted for children, the police officer image is often reflected in animal-based programming, see *Paw Patrol* (2013-present), that works to softly translate themes of power and obedience. In most episodes, missions are completed through a satisfying action routine and the dismantling of an evil villain. While their purpose is to entertain children, these narratives function as an initiator for common perceptions of law enforcement. Our intrigue with the topic of crime and justice is undoubtedly sparked through the images and stories consumed in childhood, as explored in *Chapter One*.

The repetitious development of police television dramas and comedy programs, which often depict the behaviour of the corrupt officer (e.g., the donut-eating sergeant or fierce Latina/black female detective), is another stream of knowledge production that fuels popular debates on the efficiency of community policing in adulthood. These representations may be set in different cities and highlight varying lead celebrities, but the premise of chase and apprehension always remain central to this genre. These pre-set identities function as an embellished layer to public understandings about crime and the justice system.

Reality television programming is strategically produced to cultivate audience feelings of attachment and familiarity. The camera functions as a gateway for consumers into exposing authentic life experiences of compelling subjects. Examining the intersections of reality and documentary representations, Susan Murray (2009) contends that the malleable characteristics of both genres works to create revealing and entertaining programs. An increase in documentary-reality series, that is edited to provide a behind the scenes account of policing practices and culture (see *Live PD* (2016-present) and *The First 48* (2004-present)), have dominated the television industry for decades. Promoted as authentic representations, these programs are dependent on common tropes and hyper-exaggerations for mass audience appeal. Dynamic characters and enticing storylines remain an integral part to developing any series, including the reality genre.

Recognised as the social construction of reality, Ray Surette (2015) further highlights an active creative process involved in the editing and broadcasting of narratives to the public. With accentuated frames, familiar storylines, and dynamic headlines, the media works continuously to appeal to the inquisitiveness of audiences. Throughout this project, dominant discourses (formed out of community fears and institutional rhetoric) serve as the journalistic glue to ensuring an effective publication.

Buzz phrases such as: “crime prevention”, “tough-on-crime”, and “gang culture” are recycled in the reporting of societal transgressions to instigate police rebuttals and public outrage. As modern consumers, we are programmed to interpret these phrases as momentary snapshots of true realities of the state and turn to our social institutions for immediate explanation. Insert Stanley Cohen’s (1972) perspective that the pursuit of folk devils, bodies ascribed by the media as outsiders and deviants, is a never-ending strategy in scapegoating. This construction of reality is reproduced in the newspaper coverage of the McArthur case, fueling community fears and insecurities about the current state of our society.

Kenneth F. Ferraro (1995) identifies the term *perceptual criminology* to emphasize the realization that many discourses surrounding crime, including the generation of fear, are independent of true trends of victimization, saying:

Crime is often viewed as a social problem, whether or not a person (or the person’s significant others) has actually been recently victimized, because it may lead to decreased social integration, out-migration, restriction of activities, added security costs, and avoidance of behaviours. (Ferraro, 1995, p. 3)

Not always based in facts, the perception of violence allows for the endless activations of public imaginations and curiosities to flourish. We become dynamic

producers of our lived realities where the consumption and interpretation of crime remains an ever-shifting fear. Although not a new concept, Ferraro's (1995) perspective reminds consumers to acknowledge the far-reaching impacts of media in late modernity.

The inclusion of sharing button options, reader polls, and comment sections within publications are also mediated strategies to generate community debates. Presented as an open forum for the contribution of ideas, the media collects this data as a measure to establish popular trends and topics of grave public concern. The additional production of case timelines, including monthly and yearly breakdowns of events, is also a luring tactic used to ascribe an authoritative status to the reader and secure greater public support for each paper's political position.

The identification of prominent trends in the 365-article sample works to provide an overview perspective on the journalistic strategies behind each published narrative about the McArthur case. From a removed assessment of this case, the figures below (See *Table Four*) clearly identify the reliance on opinions (through external interviews, killer comparisons and Toronto Pride conflicts) to shape greater perspectives on the function of Toronto police. The articles frequently include the thoughts of a guest editor or the inclusion of expert testimonies to strengthen mediated accounts of mounting

crime rates in our city. Having published significantly on the McArthur case, articles from *The Toronto Star* must be critically reviewed.

Table 4 – Trends in Types of Articles Published - Five Selected Sources, Jan – Dec 2018

<u>Publications</u>	<u>Total*</u>	<u>Editorial Pieces**</u>	<u>Police Critique</u>	<u>Police Promotion</u>
NOW Magazine	12	04	09	00
The Globe and Mail	65	35	17	03
The Toronto Star	207	118	37	01
The Toronto Sun	69	15	06	09
<u>Xtra</u>	12	00	04	05

*Total articles of sample broken down by source.

**Including killer comparisons, external opinions on police accountability and case, Pride controversies, interviews with community members and victims’ families.

Analysis of the selected sample determined an emphasis on two primary themes affiliated with the evaluation of the Toronto Police Service: critique and promotion. Using the McArthur case as an opening statement, many of the reviewed publications used their platform to reiterate negative police evaluations or to highlight unrelated issues of law enforcement. A divisiveness between the average community member and modern structures of power and control is strengthened by the circulation of media narratives. This observation only further reinforces claims of the absolute power that the media holds in the shaping of public consciousness.

The selected sample allotted significant publication space for the dissection of contemporary (and historical) policing practices and for detailing ongoing investigation strategies towards uncovering Bruce McArthur’s transgressions (See *Table Five*).

Referencing periods of police condemnation and public homophobia towards the LGBTQ2 community in Toronto, many of the journalistic pieces worked to situate the McArthur investigation within a lengthy institutional critique of law enforcement. It is at this juncture that community expectations of police behaviour become a leading reported theme for the public to debate.

Table 5 – Prominent Themes in Five Selected Publications, Jan – Dec 2018

<u>Publications</u>	<u>Total Articles Published</u>	<u>Policing Practices*</u>	<u>History of LGBTQ**</u>	<u>Investigation Overview</u>
NOW Magazine	12	11	09	02
The Globe and Mail	65	25	21	43
The Toronto Star	207	32	28	53
The Toronto Sun	69	27	14	40
Xtra	12	07	02	06

*Evaluation of policing responses in Toronto.

**With the Toronto Police Service.

Note: Multiple categories can be applied to the content of one evaluated article.

In contemporary society, the presence of policing bodies represents dissimilar meanings for members of marginalized communities (including those in lower income brackets, struggling with mental health issues, and residents of high crime areas). Serving

as a figure of dominance and oppression, the officer can be viewed as a forceful link within structural chains of racism. Decades of repeated discrimination, war, and isolation towards marked bodies of (perceived) difference, including periods of slavery and segregation, have produced permanent scars on perspectives towards the element of power and governance in our world. In many countries, the friendly neighbourhood police officer is a utopian image trumped by retributive figures.

Policing in The Village

In Toronto, the history of interactions between the police and LGBTQ2 community has been varied with moments of over-policing (re: Toronto Bathhouse Raids in 1981) and under-protection (re: several cold cases dating back to 1970s). Taking steps towards unification, the police and community have now engaged in productive dialogues for establishing trust and equal protection. The development of an *LGBTQ2 Liaison* position by the Toronto Police Service is one example of this growing relationship.

An evaluation of the prominent themes in the article sample (*see Table Five*) reveals a heightened critique of the interactions between the police and the LGBTQ2 community. Working to spark outrage and divisiveness, these journalistic reports argue that prejudice and fear (on the part of law enforcement) are behind this spree of serial killings. A lack of communication with the public and the police's devaluation of LGBTQ2

bodies are reportedly stressed as key explanations for the missing bodies linked to McArthur's crimes. This form of journalism is not only inaccurate – in the sense that it defers the blame for these murders away from McArthur – but it also works to dismantle any progress that has been made in the relationship between the police and the LGBTQ2 community. Additionally, key societal issues related to sexuality and race, which are prominent in this case, are overshadowed by this mediated noise.

The Toronto Police Service initiated two investigations aimed at uncovering several missing bodies from The Village. *Project Houston* (active in 2012) received significant media backlash when officers were unsuccessful in apprehending a violent serial killer. The media used this perceived failed investigation as an opportunity to extend superficial stories of police dereliction, referencing historical conflicts of decades prior. Working to emphasize hierarchies of power and dominance, circulated narratives of neglect and bias were the prominent headlines amongst publications during this period. These images and storylines encouraged members of the LGBTQ2 community to develop and post missing persons notices and call for immediate police attention to the open cases, leading to the initiation of *Project Prism* (2017). Note: the Toronto Police Service continued to follow leads, conduct interviews, and seize computers during these projects and were limited in the details they could share with the public to ensure

investigative integrity. The media cannot be granted authoritative status by the public for recounting police practices and strategies, especially when these journalists are not privy to actual investigative procedures.

The media machine remains society's most powerful and unsuspecting medium of control. The reach of this industry across multiple platforms, through use of selected images, key words, and expert testimony, is instant in shaping public opinions about varying societal institutions. To meet their own motivations, the media publicizes incomplete representations of victims, perpetrators, and police alike. These divisive narratives, concerning to police and LGBTQ2 relations, are enhanced through this platform where key issues of race and sexuality are deduced as insignificant to cover. This project does not solicit sympathy for the public receptions of the Toronto Police Service, rather an awareness for levels of control and individual agency are an essential takeaway to fully understand cycles of violence and fear in late modernity.

4.3: Eliminating Violence and the Media?

Narratives about eliminating public violence continues to dominate modern culture through popular programming, news reporting, and political campaigns. Our utopian dreams of co-existence and equality remain uninterrupted goals of humanity. Zero tolerance policies, including the development of risk assessments and crisis

response strategies, have become dependent tools for the heeding of any potentially harms on our communities. My cultural criminological mind asks: *Do we really want to eradicate violence in society? How else will we satisfy our media-managed hunger for excitement and conflict? What else will placate lived moments of boredom?*

Although an unpopular opinion, the presence of violence in our communities does function as a vital artery on which livelihoods, pleasure, and scholarship are dependent.

The ever-shifting definitions of societal violence also makes the above notion of total eradication both unrealistic and challenging. Ranging from disciplinary practices of parenting to online-reality gaming culture, violence continues to manifest in all sectors of modern life. For instance, ongoing debates about abortion and human rights, prominent within current discourse in the United States, are also longstanding issues that carry on through generational sentiments. With this contentious subject, the concept of violence is both applied to the unborn fetus and female body. In all scenarios, corporate and political tides continue to profit from the presence of transgressive narratives and behaviours.

Vested groups and public supporters of contemporary media argue for the impartial reporting of everyday occurrences. Working to relay information through multiple mediums, including social media and breaking news segments, this industry has

an important function in our societal landscape. The news media operates as an intermediary between the government and public, serves to generate and reinforce cultural values, and is a site for entertainment. A level of perceived authenticity is granted to these news generators due to the funding, resources, and technologies used fuel this narrative machine. Although this project is rooted in a cultural criminology perspective and offers a critique of contemporary news media, it does not argue for the total eradication of journalistic thought. My research is calling for a diversification of storytellers amongst the news media industry, where the standard 'crime reporter' role should be occupied by a variety of assorted perspectives. This strategy would encourage the coverage of race and queer narratives to be no longer publically ignored, a call to action also echoed by Malik and Fatah (2019).

News coverage of the Bruce McArthur investigation serves as a noteworthy analysis towards understanding the overwhelming influence of media corporations versus police powers in contemporary society. Focus on the headlines, images, types, and themes utilized in the article sample highlights discourses of privilege associated with this Canadian serial killer and avoids any pertinent discussions on race and sexuality. Veiled under a political and historical critique of policing practices, these articles ultimately emphasize the cyclical dominance of the media industry over the shaping of public

consciousness and behaviours. *Chapter Five* will further explore notions of consumerism, technology, and self-promotion affiliated with our growing media industry.

“The increasing confluence and complexity of media channels have provided moral entrepreneurs and political authorities with ever more sophisticated symbolic tools and accelerated the production and dissemination of moral panics.”

(Ferrell, 1998, p. 80)

Technology, Consumerism, and the Murder Podcast

Chapter Five

“The main question that uses and gratifications scholars still seek to answer is not “What do the media do to people?” but, “What do people do with the media?” (see Katz, 1959)”

(Boling & Hull, 2018, p. 95)

On December 27, 2019, the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* published comments by Elamin Abdelmahmoud, the Editor of Curation for *BuzzFeed News*, related to the overwhelming takeover of the internet within late modernity. A critical piece on the functions of technology in shaping human behaviour, the author strives to emphasize the rapidity of changing culture over the past decade. Abdelmahmoud (2019) states: “The notions of, “Hey, so I saw this person on Tinder and so I looked up their Instagram and then I took an Uber to meet them,” is an illogical sentence to someone who lived in 2010 because none of those things existed.” Potentially a comical statement for those who once experienced a world without these technological platforms, I was immediately struck by fear and uncertainty for what the following decade would unravel.

This reflexive research project has moved beyond a textual analysis of published articles on the MacArthur case and has stressed an importance in evaluating the alarming dynamics between the media (including social institutions of justice and technological advancements), elements of social cohesion, and more broadly the lived anxieties of the modern world. The arguments serve as a warning for the incessant development of new

content mediums that will continue to reduce our agency and disseminate hyper-exaggerated narratives. The production of podcast programming is assuredly the latest expansion of news oligopolies, as they work to influence public perceptions about social issues. An exploration of this medium will be reviewed in the following pages.

The mediated realms of information sharing and entertainment are enhanced by cycles of repetition and instantaneous access. As produced images and storylines overtake our lived realities, the human experience has become a site of digital absorption across multiple technological platforms. Subscribing to accepted stereotypes related to themes of gender, race, age, class, education, etc., this *info-tainment* (see Surette & Otto, 2002) industry has nurtured unrelenting consumers who are immensely intrigued with the (perceived) lived realities of others. At the most simplistic level of analysis, the global media industry is significantly propelled by the element of curiosity. Audiences are intrigued by the circumstances of fellow beings in search of an ideal pathway to acceptance and belonging. This inquisitiveness is the spark for an economically-fueled industry of assiduous storylines on personhood that are easily shaped and sold.

The development and persistence of technologies is a primary influencer in the adaption of the above cycles, where elements of time and profit are the most valued commodities. The introduction of self-checkout lines, automated customer care services,

and the deployment of robots in packaging warehouses (re: *Amazon*) are modern examples of techno-infused cycles that are ever evolving. With these advancements come great public expectations around the efficiency of service with minimum room for error. Technological devices also remain the fastest format through which media producers can disseminate selected and formatted narratives.

Critical details on the manipulations and dominations of oligopolistic media corporations are central to scholarly discussions on the modern impacts of spectatorship and mediated cycles. Perceptions of victimhood are ascribed to the audience, as corporate and government values are transmitted through varying common narratives. Notions that consumers are stripped from their agency and abilities to critically dissect presented information or are pawns within a larger economic-driven game, are repeated through these academic contributions. The examination of news coverage in this project further emphasizes moments of information framing and narrative enhancements for media outlets to secure readership; however, these claims do not absolve the viewer from their role in fueling the contemporary news-media industry.

The lens of cultural criminology calls on academics to situate everyday moments of transgression within larger fields of consumerism and corporatization. The toxic relationship between the consumer and product are key tenets of the late-modern era

that are overtaking our society. This chapter expands on themes of consumption and fear identified through this review of the McArthur case – which are founded on the intersections of technology, crime, and profit in our contemporary world. Exploring the Katz (1959) quote that opens this chapter, the audience’s utilizations and interpretations of media are reviewed.

5.1: Technology, Surveillance, and the Body

The societal structures of late modernity are most accurately characterized as existing within a *culture of control* (Garland, 2001). The unremitting surveillance and concealed tracking of the human body has intensified over the twenty-first century and has developed into a monetized industry. The emergence of smart-phone technologies, online rewards programs, fitness apps, and facial recognition software has led to the daily collection of personal data by both corporations and the government. Security measures designed and implemented into portable gadgets, such as location settings and fingerprint detection, also eliminate all notions of wandering and concealment in everyday routines. Even one’s private information, including medical details, can be easily extracted from their devices. The standards of confidentiality are challenged and replaced with modern technological initiatives powered by computers.

Appealing to bodily desires, technology functions as a steering tool towards our submission to the powerful institutions within society. Powerful corporations actively pursue the collection of consumer data, to develop and market profitable products that align with set community values. Generating a culture of power (Hall, 1973), information collected through consumption practices (including the direct purchasing or downloading of items) functions as the fuel behind larger political and economic decisions. The ability to predict and manage the needs of larger populations only emphasizes greater stratifications of class and opportunity.

The intensification of consumer society matched with growing fears of economic instability and future security form an inexorable cycle of distress within late modernity. Individuals are searching for any retrievable morsel of reassurance and guarantee for a fruitful life. The 2019-2020 political debates between Ontario's Provincial Government and Teachers' Unions across the province is a current example of the urgent yearning for the political and economic recognition of the vast contributions of teaching faculty. The human body craves appreciation amongst an ever-fluctuating world of unsteadiness and voracity.

As surveillance routines are exceedingly ingrained into modern socialization practices, individuals often submit their beings to various tracking technologies. The

opportunity to participate in a competitive and enlightening sphere, while surrendering all respects of privacy, is a promising ploy of comfort for consumers. Standards of confidentiality are muted to allow for the capitalization of products. A chance to assume a preferred and idolized identity, by purchasing and owning gadgets, is also interlaced within this process.

In the opening CBC article, Abdelmahmoud (2019) contends that technology's monetization of our attention has spawned a disquieting evolution where our interactions and consumption patterns have become depersonalized. We continue to seek new processes for streamlining our behaviours and purchasing practices with minimal concern for the forfeiting of any personal agency. This evolution is firmly masked under themes of convenience and immediacy but is truly a jolting shift to our existence. The following question should be leading our anxieties: *What does the development of this technology really mean for the future?*

Fears of victimization are further commoditized into technologies of surveillance and protection. A (temporary) consolidation is marketed through the procuring of home alarm systems and location tracking software. Even the increasing need for animal monitoring is answered through the development of chip readers. A level of comfort is now achieved through the saturation of technology in our daily lives. In identifying the

process of commodification our culture, Dallas Smythe (1978) asserts: "...companies, audiences, and advertisers [are] in a set of reciprocal relationships" (as cited in Mosco, 2009, p. 137). The podcast medium marks a contemporary example of how through technology (reckless) content producers can directly impact the body and societal perceptions.

Podcasting History

In 2004, journalist Ben Hammersley recognized an *audible revolution*, stemming from the 1980s, in the production and dissemination of news media. The emergence of an amateur radio format was becoming more popular, as users attached to new technological devices (e.g., *MP3* players, *iPods*), audio production software was readily downloadable, and Internet blogging remained a celebrated pastime by users. Offering the conceivable name of "podcasting", a new genre of information sharing had arrived (Hammersley, 2004).

Originally predicted as then end of linear radio, a claim that has since been challenged by the persistence of this news medium, the podcast has facilitated a fluid process of imaginative content production for many. As Street (2012) states: "Boundaries between 'radio' and 'audio' may be blurred, the appetite for creative making and committed listening is strong and enthusiastic and growing more all over the world"

(pp.112-13). During the early years of the twenty-first century, the podcast was celebrated for providing individual agency and a relief from societal schedules to users (Berry, 2015). Although original downloading processes were tedious (e.g., tracking the desired link, copying/pasting it into *iTunes*, downloading the podcast to a computer, and finally syncing to *iPod* for later consumption (as described by Webster, 2014)), podcast technology has since advanced to be instantly retrieved on any device. Listeners have been granted a reflexive freedom in how and when they can consumer these podcast narratives.

The inception of the crime podcast genre is primarily credited to the 2014 release of *Serial*, an investigative program presented by journalist Sarah Koenig. Exploring the 1999 murder of eighteen-year-old Hae Min Lee and the conviction of her former boyfriend Adnan Syed in Baltimore, the twelve-episode series took audiences through a detailed timeline and fascinating evaluation of evidence. The private experience of listening to Koenig reveal her investigative discoveries works to transport the consumer in to a world of mystery and excitement. As Berry (2015) describes: “What *Serial* did was offer a podcast that not only had mass appeal but also presented itself as a narrative in which the audience could engage with intellectually and emotionally” (p. 171). The popularity of *Serial* demonstrated an effective translation of true-crime narrative

strategies, already common in television and film representation, to a new sensationalized mainstream platform.

5.2: Popular Crime and the Podcast Generation

Strategic mediated representations of criminal events continue to maintain a gripping hold on individual realities of security and violence within our current society. Infused with elements of cinematic production and selective editing processes, these narratives of criminal behaviours are transformed into profitable modes of art. Although not a new concept for academic interrogation, it is the latest shifts in “popular criminology” (Rafter, 2007, p. 415) that have granted audiences with greater authority in the formation of anti-state sentiments and fantasy-based perspectives of modern crime. The ability to (re)access these transgressive narratives through varying devices and locations further works to cement conservative ideologies of victimhood, blame, and privilege on the consumer public.

The podcast medium continues to gain immense popularity on a global scale for instantly accessible and entertaining discussions on all topics. Recently adopted as part of publicity strategies for popular figures, the production of narratives through this form of technology grants levels of (perceived) authority to these knowledge producers. In fact, within this fluid medium, standards for vetting content are ignored.

The *Last Podcast on the Left* program was originally released in 2011 and has since published 469 episodes. Hosted by comedians Ben Kissel and Henry Zebrowski, along with support from producer Marcus Parks, this series examines the presence of horror narratives in both the real world and the imagined. The May 9, 2018 release of *Side Stories: Bruce McArthur* episode best exemplifies the recklessness of content production within this medium where sexualized and grotesque humour is carelessly coupled with discussions of murder and modern policing practices. Referring to the bodies of McArthur's victims, found in large-size planters, as "dude trees" and joking about the types of sexual "gifts" this killer passed out to children during his employment as a mall Santa, this podcast trivializes issues of community justice by shocking its audiences (Kissel, Parks, Zebrowski, 2018). Processes of disassociation and NIMBY-ism are further cemented through insensitive and outlandish commentary.

Disseminated as digital audio files, podcasts require very minimal production equipment and expertise to develop. The use of a recording device and creation of simple branding strategies (e.g., a title and accompanying artwork) are the essentials. Like many content developers, the podcast world is formed by enthusiastic hobbyists and sponsored professionals who utilize this platform to secure publishing deals and global

followings. Episodes are easily retrievable on personal devices (e.g., mobile phones, tablets, and computers) that allow for greater diversity in audience consumption.

Considering the monetary strains and anti-government sentiments swirling in our modern world, the podcast sphere has re-emphasized two significant societal debates: 1) The power of fantasy in shaping lived realities and 2) The consequence of granting anyone a platform to disseminate their own knowledge. Both points are paralleled in the media's strategic representations of the Bruce McArthur investigation.

Fantasy and Fear

Visual culture remains one of the most powerful influencers towards public consumption and economic gains in contemporary society. A thirty-second commercial promoting an ice-cold alcoholic beverage or an ad for a body wash that serves as an instant mate attracter both appeal to the desires of the public. The conception of company logos, endorsements from popular athletes/celebrities, and the composition of recognizable musical jingles all work to engrave products into public consciousness. The visual image leaves a lasting imprint on the consumerist desires of many.

The formula of advertising in visual culture is premised on transmitting selected storylines to the consumer in the most efficient approach. A reality is confirmed through the produced image. Leaving no room for false interpretations and relying on common

stereotypes, the image is most powerful when it can instantly influence the viewer emotionally, physically, or both. The stills of police digging for remains of McArthur's victims at a house on Mallory Crescent in Toronto or varying released portraits of the infamous murderer used by popular newspapers all work to simultaneously reinforce choice narratives and leave lasting impressions on readers. Over time, the images circulating in our culture form an encyclopedia of knowledge in the mind that is referenced when determining personal/political opinions, shaping relationships, and disseminating contempt.

The image has also worked to represent historical moments of fear and oppression, categorize bodies based on difference, and serve as identifiable and official markers for organizations. Released into everyday life and often re-circulated over time, these visual pieces are weighted in societal discourses of power and manipulation. The popularity of tattoos in gang and prison cultures, as symbols of allegiance and transgressions, is one example of the lasting impression of images in our contemporary culture.

Philosophical viewpoints have often argued that the image holds no power or meaning until being in contact with the body. It is through human interaction that values and interpretations are disseminated onto the visual. We rely on our socialization to

inform our understandings of symbols, colours, and patterns. This interpretation works to emphasize the power of our minds (and senses) in both retaining and understanding the content that surrounds us. Consider the semiotic meaning ascribed to flags: the maple leaf symbol has become a globally recognizable trait of Canada. The rainbow flag is most commonly associated with LGBTQ2 communities. The Confederate Battle flag, represented by a red background and a navy and white starred 'X', encourages racist ideologies of white supremacy and slavery. Through societal consensus, these symbols have continued to circulate for decades. The viewer transitions in to a position of authority when interpreting and sharing images.

The podcast medium is arguably a more dangerous medium in the encouragement of fantasy and shaping of public fears. Listening to selected narratives, the consumer relies on their imagination and memory senses towards interpreting each episode. Unlike traditional image-based representations, that depict characters and storylines with precise details, the podcast genre depends on a person's pre-developed catalog of images for the transmission of information and ratings. There is unmeasurable opportunity for the misinterpretation or augmentation of realities through this technological platform. The consumer is granted a creative licence that is parallel to the radio.

The Podcasting Producer

The 1938 United States broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* starring Orson Welles, originally a science fiction novel written by H. G. Wells in 1897, created national panic surrounding the impending erosion of Earth. This radio dramatization detailed the story of a Martian invasion on our planet that was eerily realistic. The sounds of alarming war machines moving closer to New York City and reports of mysterious creatures occupying communities sparked pandemonium, as listeners stampeded through the streets and anxiously called police, newspaper offices, and radio stations to report this apocalyptic event. High rates of suicides were also attributed to this broadcast. This recording has since been replayed at campfires and in classrooms for decades as a form of entertainment.

While they both optimize the airwaves for the transmission of public narratives, the signifying difference between the radio and podcast technology is the designation of the producer. For radio programming in Canada, the creator must apply for a Broadcasting Licence through the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission plus pay for varying start-up expenses (including studio and transmitting equipment, engineering fees and talent). Amateur radio operators are also required to pass a basic examination with a mark of 70% or greater to receive their licence. A desired

level of professional expertise and funding are required for programming to be produced (*Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, 2020*).

For podcasts, the creator simply requires a microphone/recording device and can produce content with minimal expertise and funds. Government regulations are not applied to this sector, allowing producers to disseminate any knowledge to the public. The ease of this technological platform has encouraged any person to suddenly become a 'Podcaster'. Promoters of the podcast genre argue the freedom granted to people in developing and sharing their opinions within this highly-restricted period of late modernity. Finally, the voices of any person can be amplified and granted legitimacy.

The podcast arena has commonly been identified as an alternate space where minority voices and unpopular perspectives can be celebrated. Drawing on the concept of "subaltern counterpublics" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67), the podcast is argued by scholars as one of many technological mediums that offers a sphere for oppositional identities and interests to be publically heard. The opportunity for individuals to contribute their voices to larger collectives of narrative production is celebrated without greater consideration for potential societal consequences. Gayatri Spivak's (1988) "subaltern" term further emphasizes the discrepancies in opportunities and power amongst people where the

'other' must be acknowledged (pp. 66-111). Under this lens, it is argued that all bodies should be provided with a platform for their viewpoints to be publically acknowledged.

A new profession of the social influencer has also evolved in legitimacy through the presence of social media and opportunities for self-generated content. Strategies including the use of explicit photographs or displaying of outlandish opinions have been employed by these technology users to attract the greatest audience response. Many influencers gain celebrity status with the incessant posting of content and through the ambassadorship of several brands where compensation is generated through increasing consumption by followers. Another easily retrievable format used to influence public behaviours, the podcast medium serves as an effective addition to the modern sphere of self-content producers.

Through a cultural criminology lens, the opportunity for a technological medium to grant any individual with a platform for the sharing of ideas is both dangerous and fear-producing. Increasing amounts of opinions shared only boost the noise level of societal dialogues to a deafening and irresponsible level. I am not arguing for the complete removal of public viewpoints or the sharing of perspectives; however, it is imperative that we as listeners actively evaluate the producers of knowledge to separate

truth from fiction. It is not enough to counteract the domineering voices of society's elite with greater public chatter.

5.3: Surviving Late Modernity

In this fluctuating period of privatization and corporate incentives, societal institutions have embedded their claws in to people's daily interactions and behaviours. Cultural norms and political ideologies are reinforced through interactions in the workplace, school, and home. Common values of ideal personhood (see *Chapters Two & Four*) and copious amounts of consumption have become the molasses-type glue that serves to keep communities aligned with greater political and lawful perspectives. Although Canadians engage in democratic processes for the election of societal leaders, features of meritocracy and privilege continue to monopolize the spectrum of control. It is this larger issue of power and dominance that needs to be reconsidered instead of simply adding more voices to the already muddy social terrain.

Larger societal structures, such as the criminal justice, economic, and political systems, require greater public critique in terms of how the contemporary functions of consumerism operate within our world. The currency of both money and bodies (in relation to incarceration practices) remains the foremost feature of how our society currently operates. Our governance is rooted in the generation and sustainment of

wealth to rule over the public. Since our tax dollars are allocated towards the funding of these structures, it is only reasonable that the public reassesses the ever-present processes of power and the production of knowledge.

Citizenship remains a highly-contested notion that permeates within the effective functioning of societal institutions. Not only are countries redefining national boundaries and policies for immigration, but the freedom of bodies remains a disputed issue even in the developed world. As many individuals flee war-torn countries and cycles of abuse for a safer life abroad, Canadians are grappling with the lived reality that the modern human experience is forever policed. In addition to adhering to expectations surrounding ideal personhood, including the promotion of shared values, bodies are mandated to obey sets of laws and policies that are most restrictive. We must abide by the Canadian Criminal Code and Charter of Rights and Freedoms to remain *accepted bodies* in this nation. It is through technology that social boundaries and moments of (perceived) freedom are reinforced to all.

Technological developments are often sold to the public with the intention of fostering greater opportunities for social connections. Through video and chat platforms, we are presented with unceasing lines of communication that surpass any distance. These products have offered a sense of community and comfort through the busy

routines of our modern lives. David McClelland's (1961) concept of *affiliation* lends most appropriately to the impact of technology on the lives of consumers. Offering a space of belonging, the podcast is the newest incarnation of many devices where people can search for shared beliefs and interests. Many argue that the authentic self is most at peace through online channels, as lived identities can be suspended.

The ability for technological mediums to facilitate the flourishing of the (perceived) authentic self is both terrifying and captivating within our contemporary landscape. An unwavering reliance on the computer and coding systems to shape our daily behaviours and ultimate self-worth speaks to the degradation of true community. Yes, children and consumers can develop problem-solving skills and subscribe to groups holding common interests through technology, but it is the moments for socio-emotional learning that are abandoned. Opportunities to process emotions and realities are often replaced with virtual gaming and online character development. The comforts of engaging in face-to-face conversations with peers or seeking self-help from wellness experts are avoided through the expansion of new technologies. This cultural criminological perspective calls for a reconsideration of the functions of tech in modernity and an interrogation into the social forces that encourage us to partake in these often-toxic mediums.

On November 13, 2019, Humber College's *Forensic Identification Program* facilitated an invited lecture with the lead Investigators from the Bruce McArthur case. Lasting three hours, Inspector Hank Idsinga and two Forensic Officers, Lawrence Parasam and Peter Gendi, detailed the strategies and precision involved in the collecting of evidence. The Investigators highlighted a variety of different technologies, including lights, swabs, and spatial reconstruction, as essential to the success of solving the case.

As a graduate student interested in the current intersections of crime and media, I found the officers' evaluation of the journalistic practice affiliated with the McArthur case most compelling. These investigators detailed the challenges in balancing the media's expectations for continuous case updates with the responsibility of preserving the integrity of the various crime scenes. They mentioned frustrations with the format of news journalism in relation to the monetization and shortening of stories into easily consumable snippets for the public. According to the presenters, these soundbites were often inaccurate and served to ignite public frustrations with the police. Although not the premise of the presentation, this discussion brings focus to the driving motivations behind the mass consumption of new technologies, with an emphasis on fears of loneliness and isolation.

Program apps, software updates, security technologies, etc., are arguably all produced based on two primary factors: effectiveness and boredom. We are continuously searching for ways to make our daily practices easier, despite some technological interventions (e.g., the grocery store self-checkout) that can cause a greater disruption in time. We are also further intrigued by the various games that are developed to hook users during monotonous life moments (e.g., *CandyCrush* (2012) and *Fortnite* (2017)). In either situation, technology is designed based on set coding languages and engineering principles that are quantifiable and absolute. It is the added element of consumerism that influences the application of technology in our modern world.

Capitulating to the currents of hyper-consumption, the technological saturation of our late capitalism era encourages users to alter the implementations of various devices for additional gains. We have become too dependent on the presence of technology, to streamline our behaviours and make life easier, that we cannot separate from disquieting themes of control and manipulation. For example, Apple's *Find Your iPhone* technology was originally designed for users to track their devices if lost or stolen. Many consumers have now adopted this technology to track their partner's behaviours, fueling feelings of paranoia and potential isolation. The Google *Home* and Amazon's *Alexa* pods that are encouraged for maximum home efficiency in daily routines (e.g., security, ordering

products, listening to music) have subsequently been altered by online hackers to record personal conversations and monitor behaviours. In these cases, themes of fear and potential victimization remain prevalent consequences of techno-infused world.

A discussion on the relationship between crime and technology would be incomplete without the assessment of the development versus application of advancements. The greatest measure of the symptoms of late modernity, characterized by Anthony Giddens (1990) as a “juggernaut”, relating to an overwhelming force/institution, can be deduced from how technology is embedded into our social existence (p. 53). Our digital aptitude is far surpassing any emotional intelligence that we glean offline.

The podcast medium is a contemporary example of how journalistic standards continue to dissolve into a techno-dominant culture full of celebrity and financial gain. Adding to Jewkes (2015) deviancy amplification cycle (see *Chapter Four*), the true crime podcast opens the door for any person to become a content producer with limited oversight and review. For a research project that actively works to identify the unyielding force of the media industry in shaping public consciousness, the implications of podcasting are pertinent to explore.

Yardley and colleagues (2019) use an ultra-realist lens to evaluate the emergence of true crime podcasts as a successor to the popular genre of the fiction crime novel. Exploring six episodic crime podcasts, themes of identity and power (common to the McArthur investigation) are reviewed.

Firstly, Yardley et al. (2019) examine how features of the neoliberal state are further capitalized and marketed for greater public consumption. Notions of individualization and deregulation (primarily of financial markets), which are sources of immense anxiety for members of the working class, have been given a platform through a podcast medium. The ability to generate content without restrictions proves to be a pleasurable outlet for producers amongst this chaotic period of modernity.

Justin Ling's (2019) third season of the *Uncover: The Village* podcast, distributed through the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Media Centre, focuses on the intersections of sexuality, policing, and justice in Toronto. Episode eight – *A Confession* (length 47:37 minutes) – is an edited platform where this journalist dissects public perceptions and frustrations surrounding the McArthur investigation. The episode ultimately contributes to greater societal narratives centered on systemic biases. Inserting eerie music during Ling's (2019) narrative summary of case events, the spectacle of crime-journalism is initiated for the consumer to enjoy. Posing questions

critiquing investigative tactics and disciplinary practices for Toronto officers, Ling recites an authoritative perspective on the criminal justice system. Note: interviews with members of the Toronto Police Service are centered on cold cases and detective strategies, with discussions moving away from addressing any of Ling's claims on police negligence. Air time is also dedicated for members of the LGBTQ2 community to share their viewpoints and resources for support (Ling, 2019). Referencing Yardley et al.'s (2019) discussion on emotional manipulation through podcast narratives, this particular episode is one example (of many) on how technology can be used as a platform for the unchallenged dissemination of opinions.

Similarities between true crime novels and the podcast are mainly emphasized by an entertainment angle to content development. As Boling's (2019) research works to discern the intentions of the podcast platform as either a journalistic tool or justice mediator, it is the pleasure-seeking mission of this medium that is most apparent. The topics, music, personalities, and editing are all essential elements towards the creation of highly-receptive channels. Building on Stanley Cohen's (1972) discussion on the initiation of moral panics, podcast technology also depends on common rhetoric and stereotypes to attract audiences and ultimately enhance fears. Although not a new concept of panic

manipulation, the unceasing transmission through varying technological mediums makes this social phenomenon even more difficult to contain.

The cycles of production within the technology space are not only fueled by competition for the conception of newer software and features, it is the larger societal currents of boredom, fear, and isolation that truly motivate this industry. The news coverage of the Bruce McArthur investigation serves as an ideal case study for evaluating how uncontrolled narrative production can magnify, through broadcast on varying mediums, into greater public unrest and frustrations with societal institutions.

We are essentially participants in the manifestation of our own fears.

“Worse still, we fetishistically disavow our active collusion in the repression we bring on ourselves and blame it on imaginary external forces ... We have allowed these imaginary substitute objects to be ideologically manufactured and presented to us by our refusal to address the real causes of our objectless anxiety, all of which are associated with the unstable, unpredictable and divisive liberal-capitalist system.”

(Hall & Winlow, 2015, p. 113)

“Feed me, Seymour!” – A Conclusion

Chapter Six

“For many people an issue does not exist until it appears in the news media.”

(Michael Parenti, 1986, IX)

One of the most recognizable songs from *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1986) musical occurs during the climax of the storyline where Seymour, the flower shop owner, is confronted with an angry and hungry plant. As Audrey II (the plant) continues to expand and attract public attention to the business, her demand to exclusively consume fresh, human blood becomes impossible for Seymour to fulfill. The shopkeeper is faced with a pivotal decision between continuing to feed Audrey II or losing all customer interest in the store. In a deep baritone voice supported by a rock melody, the plant commands “feed me, Seymour!” – offering promises of wealth, love, and status in exchange (The Little Shop of Horrors, 1986). This catchy and entertaining scene serves as a powerful analogy for the ongoing dynamics of consumption, pleasure, and human anxiety within our contemporary world.

Like Audrey II, the modern consumer has become reliant on absorbing the most current trends/news stories and deriving instant pleasure from every transaction. Ongoing developments in technology and inventions only helps to facilitate this ever-expanding appetite for public acceptance and escapism. It is in this voyeuristic moment

that the spectator can suspend lived realities and soothe social anxieties, a key perspective of the cultural criminology field. The image offers an opportunity to temporarily adopt altered identities and fantasize about different life experiences. Regardless of legitimacy, we consume any representation or purchase any product that appeals to our heightened-perceptions of self. This cycle of late modernity, fueled by fears of loneliness and suffering, continues to have a tight hold on us all. Bringing a collective awareness to this alarming process is a central motivation of this research project.

This reflexive research study utilizes four categories of analysis (headline, image, type, theme) towards examining the journalistic representations of the McArthur case. Appealing to mass audiences, the data collected (from January to December 2018) establishes an inflation in stereotypes and a simplification of narratives exercised by media producers. Strategic goals of achieving maximum viewership and financial success remain an obvious priority in this industry. The repeated insertion of McArthur images also works to distract consumers from larger themes of race, sexuality, and identity – the most distinctive elements of this case. An avoidance of key social issues on homophobia and the colonialism of bodies sparks greater discussions on the dominating forces of the media industry in our contemporary society.

Two primary warnings are considered throughout this liquid ethnographic analysis: 1) the pervading culture of fear that has dominated our modern lives and 2) the manipulation of societal behaviours through the media's oligopolistic reach and new technologies. While many consumers feared the presence of a serial killer living amongst their community, greater concerns for the diminishment of free will and critical thought were at the forefront for this scholar. The McArthur case serves as an urgent example for how the partnership between the contemporary media and technology industries has a toxic effect in shaping our behaviours and transforming our understandings of contemporary society.

Advancements in modern technology continue to establish a disquieting evolution towards the eradication of human interactions and lived realities. Ray Surette (2015) outlines several key issues with the advancement and appeal of popular culture narratives/images in late modernity. Likening public consumptions to a person only eating a diet of candy, these hyper-produced representations can rot one's true perceptions of reality (Surette, 2015). Often led by selected key words in a headline or a front-page image, the production of news has become an industry filled with strategies to secure readership and ratings. These edited bites of information are strung together by the consumer and often serve as the foundation for the development of strong

opinions on any social matter. The media serves as the prominent source for knowledge production in our current state of modernity, thus the motivation for this study is sparked by the need to critically examine the *carnival* of news (Presdee, 2000) that is so hastily edited and distributed to the public.

The field of cultural criminology is dedicated to ongoing reflexive examinations of the current intersections of crime and consumerism. The diversity of media platforms, including the podcast, have fostered a never-ending development of content that soothes our anxieties, distracts us from boredom, and provides opportunities to alter our identities. This consumer dependency continues to adjust public understandings on the functions of social institutions and perceptions of community safety. It is the interdisciplinary quality of cultural criminology that offers researchers breadth to explore the infinite modes of transgressive behaviours that are affiliated with our modern existence. The encouragement to develop a reflexive ethnographic project, merging qualitative and minimal quantitative approaches, is also a notable feature of this criminological perspective.

As examined in *Chapter Two*, the study of criminology remains a highly diverse and debated field aimed at understanding the emergence and impacts of violence on our communities. Strict perspectives in support of biological/psychosocial or environmental

factors have traditionally driven researchers to avoid dynamic, qualitative perspectives of crime. The innovation of cultural criminology rests in its ability to consider all perspectives while evaluating the effects of looming macro-structures fixed in capitalism, the loss of tradition, and consumerism. The noteworthy contributions of Mike Presdee (2000) and other colleagues within this cultural criminology sphere have paved the way for this reflexive research to be credited in academia.

The encouragement for future interdisciplinary critiques of societal violence and media carnivals is a key takeaway from this project. Through repeated dissections of highly-produced narratives and tropes, researchers can further justify the importance for the public to question all information that is broadcast and sold to us. We must also be responsive to the rapid development of various technological media – including the podcast – that are leading us towards a helpless existence and baseless identity. As media cycles continue to be deployed by networks, it is our responsibility as scholars and communities to apprise our neighbours of the manipulations of reality. This research contributes to a series of critical narratives pursued by non-traditional methodological strategies, supported through sociology/economics/criminology/media-studies lenses, and challenges the operation of institutions in relation to the human experience in late modernity.

Notably, the motivations of this project have not been to criticize independent journalists or call for the complete abandonment of technology. These impulses would be trivial and unrealistic to pursue. It is the greater interrogation of societal existence, generated by economic greed and status, that is at the forefront of this analysis. The Bruce McArthur case provides Torontonians (and Canadians) with an opportunity to critically dissect contemporary media spectacles and the generation of heightened public opinions that are occurring locally. The inflation of perceived violence, dissection of police practices (from past to present), and the omission of narratives centered on race and sexuality are all key observations (from this media analysis) that reinforce currents of oppression and transgression in our society.

Amongst lengthy critiques of journalistic practices (including a review of crime reporting strategies) and media cycles in late modernity, the reckless forces of consumerism must not be diminished. Central features of power, monopolization, and profitability within this consumer society continue to rapidly pervade the functions of our culture and institutions. We exist in a period where consumption practices and wealth have been publicly discerned as markers of authentic identities. Because of this process, the technological methods in which news is disseminated, including the creative editing of lived events, is ever-changing.

The evaluation of technological developments and governance reviewed in *Chapters Four and Five* provide insight into how consumers are changing their habits and soothing anxieties when engaging with produced content. Reducing the barriers to access, new technologies enable readers and viewers to engage with violent or sensationalist content more quickly than ever before. On the other side of the scale, the media industry capitalizes on these technologies through clickbait titles and simplified images to easily capture viewers. This strategy has become excessively operationalized during the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic.

Directions for future research would include additional interrogations of podcasting culture and predictions for the evolution of technology and communications. Evaluations of the mounting media obsession with serial killers in Canada, compared to the hyper-sensationalized broadcasting climate in the United States, would be imperative to further explore as the *carnival of crime* continues to intensify.

While the podcast genre continues to grow, by developing salacious content produced to entertain mass audiences, the unregulated processes of this platform are a critical example of technological dominations in our consumer-centered world. As public demands for media escapism continue to swell, the simplified and stereotypical image no

longer satisfies cravings for the observation of transgressive and exciting narratives. We desire more intimate interactions with discussions of violence in modernity.

It is an awakening for the consumer on content manipulations in the media and the possibilities of alternate realities that is so very important.

“We are confronted every day with questions about the world we make; why we are poor or rich; why we work or don’t; why we do domestic work or don’t; why others talk to us or not. What we desire, enjoy or are excited by all circulate in the micro-circuitry of our thoughts and perceptions, continually interacting with the thoughts and micro-responses of others and other cultural forms that surround us.”

(Mike Presdee, 2000, p. 21)

Appendix One: Overview of Bruce McArthur Crimes and Investigation

The following data was retrieved from Toronto Police Service Seminars on this investigation and through media publications.

Victim #1: Skandaraj Navaratnam (40 years of age)

Origin: Sri Lanka, came to Canada as a refugee in 1990s

Last seen: September 6, 2010

Reported missing: September 16, 2010

No fixed address, left behind dog and new job

Victim #2: Abdulbasir Faizi (42 years of age)

Origin: Brampton, married father of two

Last seen: December 29, 2010

Reported missing: December 30, 2010 by family

Lived in Peel region, closeted

Victim #3: Majeed Kayhan (58 years of age)

Origin: Afghan immigrant, married with children

Last seen: October 14, 2012

Reported missing: October 25, 2012

Left behind pet birds and lived in Village

2012 – Project Houston Investigation initiated by Toronto Police Service. Prime suspect: James Brunton of Peterborough for missing men from Village. Eventually cleared as suspect but admitted to possessing, making, distributing child pornography and had cannibalistic tendencies.

June 2013 – Flyers distributed by Toronto Police Service with missing men from Village. Swift media storm on this case.

November 2013 – Bruce McArthur interviewed. Associated with victims #1 and #2 on

a dating website for gay men. "Silverfox 51" username. No formal charges given.

Victim #4 : Soroush Mahmudi (50 years of age)

Origin: Refugee from Iran, married

Last seen: August 15, 2015

Reported missing: August 22, 2015 by son-in-law

Victim #5: Dean Lisowick (47 years of age)

Origin: Resided in Toronto homeless shelters, worked in sex trade

Last seen: 2015

Never reported missing

Victim # 6: Kirushna Kumar Kanagaratnam (37 years of age)

Origin: Asylum seeker from Sri Lanka, ordered for deportation

Last seen: September 3, 2015 – January 6, 2016

Never reported missing, international warrant

June 20, 2016 – Bruce McArthur arrested for assault in choking a male victim in the back of van. Incident reported to Toronto Police Service. Sgt. Paul Gauthier currently under internal review for reporting incident.

Victim #7: Selim Esen (44 years of age)

Origin: Immigrated from Turkey

Last seen: April 16, 2017

Reported missing: August 30, 2017

Victim #8: Andrew Kinsman (49 years of age)

Origin: Active member in Toronto's LGBT community

Last seen: June 26, 2017

Reported missing: June 29, 2017

August 14, 2017 – Project Prism Investigation initiated by Toronto Police Service.

Prime suspect: Bruce McArthur

November 8, 2017 – Blood of victim #8 found in Bruce McArthur’s vehicle

December 6 & 7, 2017 – Covert search of Bruce McArthur’s apartment begins with warrants.

January 17 & 18, 2018 – Pictures of victims #7 and #8 found on Bruce McArthur’s computers.

October 22, 2018 – Bruce McArthur, accused of first-degree murder in the deaths of eight men, waives right to a preliminary hearing.

January 29, 2019 – Bruce McArthur pleads guilty.

February 8, 2019 – Bruce McArthur sentenced to eight counts of first-degree murder – served concurrently.

(The Globe and Mail, 2019), (The Toronto Star, 2019),

(The Toronto Sun, 2019), (Idsinga, 2019).

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