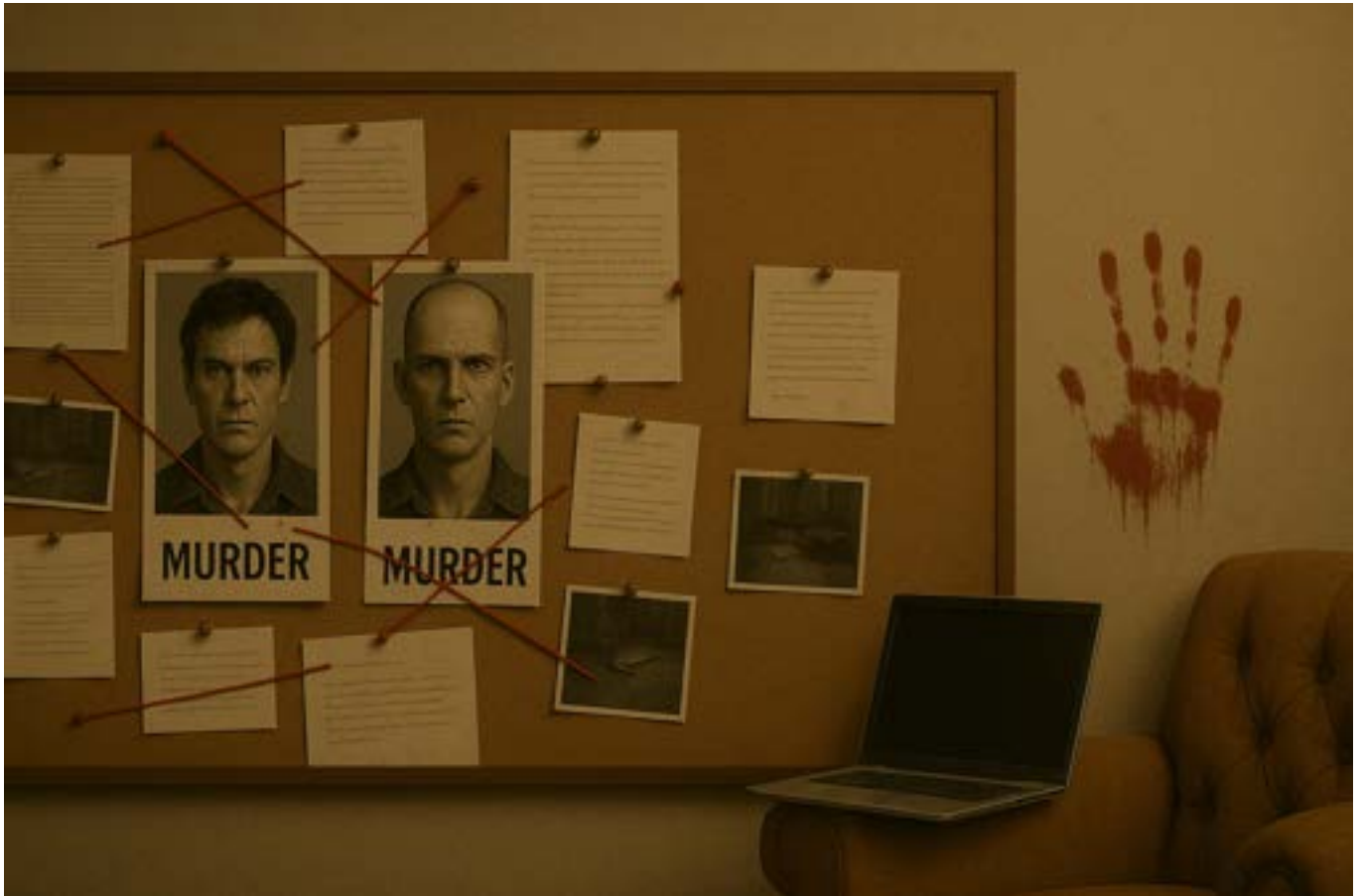# Killer Content

A cross-generational study to investigate how the oversaturation of crime in the media has influenced younger generations.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In this modern, technology-reliant world, individuals' beliefs and values are largely shaped by the content displayed in the media. Meanwhile, popular culture is moulded by the collective. This cyclical paradox illuminates the dangerous power wielded by those who generate the content we consume. Crime has had a growing presence within popular culture, and its portrayal has changed throughout time. This has created new and pressing issues for younger generations, such as desensitisation and paranoia, as they have grown up with increased exposure to criminality. In turn, as society becomes entrapped in these echo chambers of misconception, young people may develop hypervigilance or complacency towards criminal activity.

I grew up watching violent and graphic crimes being depicted by news outlets, desensitising me from a young age. This environment led me, now as a teenager, to regularly consume crime dramas as a form of entertainment, without considering ethical violations within the content I consume. Here, I hope to expose the media's increasing power over young minds and their worldviews, leading to conformity in relation to the widespread change in societal perceptions about crime.

Over time, due to the ever-increasing media coverage about criminality and the globalisation of technology, this content has become progressively easier to access. Throughout this PIP, I will be investigating the macro, meso and micro-level impacts of individuals' inevitable overindulgence. My personal conviction to uncover these ramifications led me to the hypothesis: A cross-generational study to investigate how the oversaturation of crime in the media has influenced younger generations. To distinguish the change in people's perceptions, worldviews and behaviours over time, I have compared Generation Z (1995 - 2009) to Generation X (1995 - 2009). I will attribute this shift in societal values to the newfound norms held by the 'generalised other' as seen in Mead's theory of the social self.

Throughout my research process, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data from the various methods I used. The expert interview with law enforcement officer Michael Lewis provided invaluable opinions about how exposure to media has skewed reality, which are supported by his real-life experiences in the field. Whereas, the content analysis was essential in displaying the increase in media attention on crime and its power over society's

perceptions. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of three news articles, crime dramas, documentaries, and podcasts revealed the increasing romanticisation and desensitisation to criminality across time, specifically from 1973 to 2024. Moreover, the cross-cultural component was achieved through a questionnaire providing essential insights into the psyche of each generation concerning their view on criminal activity. Importantly, the triangulation of both my primary and secondary research enabled high-quality synthesis.

This PIP has expanded my understanding of the illegitimate power bestowed upon the producers and propagators of popular culture, deepening my critical discernment of the media. In illuminating this issue, I hope to encourage people to recognise the ways they are affected by the media's coverage of crime.

LOG

The allure of viewing true crime content has increased significantly throughout my teenage years, which has led to my consistent and casual consumption of this media, in the form of documentaries, crime dramas, social media content and podcasts. Yet, one morning, I overheard my parents discussing the unethical nature of the ABC's podcast on William Tyrell due to the child's inability to consent and the invasive nature of their investigations. Consequently, this catalysed my idea and passion for my PIP topic of how the oversaturation of crime in the media has influenced younger generations.

I then began to notice my friends were stuck in a media-driven cycle of desensitisation, revealing to me the social and cultural relevance of this issue. Thus, Generation Z became a central aspect of my hypothesis. Moreover, my initial research magnified the urgency of this PIP, as the topic remains mostly unexplored. Therefore, this ignited my desire to uncover the societal impacts, by analysing both continuities and changes across generations.

My first primary research method, a questionnaire, provided useful statistics that outlined the broad scope of my topic, which guided the direction of my chapters. However, some questions provided vague answers due to the general public's nescience, highlighting to me the necessity for secondary research.

Sequentially, I then began my content analysis, which was a time-consuming and arduous process. I decided to analyse three sources across various forms of media, allowing me to grasp a better understanding of mediatised popular culture. Although this evidence was vital to my PIP, particularly in chapter one, it took numerous weeks to complete.

Furthermore, it proved difficult to acquire an expert interview due to the NSW Police's strict confidentiality laws. This led to many possible interviewees having to decline despite their desire and interest to be a part of my study. Eventually, I approached Michael Lewis, a highway patrol officer who, in the past, had gone undercover and worked for intelligence agencies on major cases. However, to combat the privacy rules, an ethical disclaimer was made at the commencement of the interview that he was strictly acting in a private capacity and not representing the police force.

Once I had successfully collated all my primary and secondary sources, the amount of information proved to be overwhelming. To counteract this, I sorted the evidence into its respective chapters and then further into paragraphs. This allowed me to successfully construct concise but dense arguments, as well as valuable and well-thought-out syntheses.

My PIP journey has prompted me to reconsider my casual viewing of violent crime and my involvement in discussing various cases. In turn, as I have learnt of the possible irreparable damages of the media's consistent crime coverage, I have been more inclined to approach it with critical discernment, improving my social and cultural literacy. Finally, concluding on the various impacts at a micro, meso and macro level, has increased my awareness of the power communication technologies have over the creation of the social self.

CRIME & CULTURE

The role of popular culture in influencing people's perception of crime, throughout generations.

The media plays a crucial role in influencing people's fears and perceptions of crime, as its sensationalised content creates and reinforces society's confirmation biases. In the past 60 years, content coverage on crime has spiked[1] and, as suggested by Soothill, the main driver of this 'Serial killer industry' has been the media[2]. In turn, this has led to distorted beliefs about the legal system and the perceived level of threat within one's society. George Mead would suggest that this interaction between the deceptive media and the impressionable individual results in the creation of a social self, an identity that aligns with the skewed beliefs held by the generalised other. Thereafter, altering individuals' worldviews that are further reinforced by people's desire to conform.

The content produced by contemporary popular culture frequently disseminates the notion that crime rates are rising[3]. However, burglary, violence, and car robbery have decreased by nearly 90% within the past 30 years[4]. Nevertheless, young people's increased exposure to crime-related content from an early age has fostered "A very disconnected state of affairs [where there is] less crime, but more and more sensationalis[t] coverage"[5]. Even so, the generalised other paradoxically demands this evocative content, as seen in the questionnaire, in which 53% of individuals consume crime-related content at least once a week[6]. According to these findings, this will cause a dangerous and perpetual cycle that supports the confirmation bias of consumers, as producers seek to uphold viewers' falsified expectations. Thus, this normalisation of sensationalised content will result in conformity amongst the generalised other and altered worldviews within the social self. This is further supported by Professor Callanan's state-wide survey, where she concluded, "Viewers of television news are

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[1] J. Shults, 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association', National Police Association, (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025

[2] K. Soothill, 'Crime and the Media: A Vicious Circle?' (1998) 70 AQ Australian Quarterly 24 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20637721> accessed 23 March 2025.

[3] S. Eschholz, 'The Media and Fear of Crime: A Survey of the Research', UF Law Scholarship Repository, (2022) <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/jlpp/vol9/iss1/2/> accessed 5 June 2025

[4] G. Farrell & T. Davies, 'Most Crime Has Fallen by 90% in 30 Years – so Why Does the Public Think It's Increased?' The Conversation (13 May 2024) <https://theconversation.com/most-crime-has-fallen-by-90-in-30-years-so-why-does-the-public-think-its-increased-228797> accessed 29 April 2025

[5] Primary Research: Questionnaire Q8 XM12

[6] Primary Research: Questionnaire Q3

receiving the message that crime is 'out of control'"[7]. As expected, the media is the driving power behind the globalised, disjointed belief on criminality; however, the research suggests that society has begun to crave and expect this content from producers.

Furthermore, popular culture has had a similar effect on skewing people's perspectives on the effectiveness and trustworthiness of the legal system[8]. This results partially from the rise of true crime, which, as seen in my content analysis, solely focuses on unsolved investigations. This resulted in increasing scepticism towards the legal system amongst the targeted audience of Generation Z[9]. This is evident in the William Tryell podcast, which stated that "unsolved homicides are real people, … but NSW police are missing… documents by the pallet load"[10]; condemning the police's inefficiency in Australia[11]. Conversely, crime dramas such as '24 Hours in Police Custody' create "totally unrealistic" expectations of police "that [they] would solve [a case] within 24 hours"[12]. These false portrayals breed distrust amongst Generation Z, as popular culture "depict[s] the legal system as effective, fast-paced" and "usually go[ing] in favour of the 'good guys'"[13]. This 'perceived realism'[14] of the media's content plays an essential role in shaping the audience's belief, majorly impacting the degree to which individuals are influenced by the story presented[15]. Yet, a Generation X respondent expresses that popular culture has "very little" impact on their beliefs relating to the legal system[16]. This highlights the negative correlation between the amount of distorted crime content consumed and young people's ability to distinguish reality from fabrication[17].

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[7] VJ. Callanan, 'Media Consumption, Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime: Examining Race/Ethnic Differences' (2012) 55 Sociological Perspectives 93 <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2012.55.1.93> accessed 15 January 2025

[8] KM. Donovan & CF. Klahm, 'The Role of Entertainment Media in Perceptions of Police Use of Force' (2015) 42 Criminal Justice and Behavior 12 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0093854815604180> accessed 27 November 2024

[9] Primary Research: Content Analysis

[10] Primary Research: Content Analysis, Pod. WT

[11] Primary Research: Content Analysis, Pod. WT

[12] Primary Research: Interview, NSW policeman

[13] Primary Research: Questionnaire Q16 FZ44

[14] S. Vincent, 'Media Constructions of Crime.' The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 539, (1995) pp. 141–54. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1048402> accessed 8 November 2024

[15] VJ. Callanan, 'Media Consumption, Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime: Examining Race/Ethnic Differences' (2012) 55 Sociological Perspectives 93 <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2012.55.1.93> accessed 15 January 2025

[16] Primary Research: Questionnaire Q16 MZ12

[17] KM. Donovan & CF. Klahm, 'The Role of Entertainment Media in Perceptions of Police Use of Force' (2015) 42 Criminal Justice and Behavior 12 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0093854815604180> accessed 27 November 2024

Contrastingly, police officers are often valorised in the media, which influences the perceptions and beliefs of specifically Caucasian people. Over the span of the content analysis (1973-2024), crime dramas began to heroise police, with a 350% increase over this time period[18]. The questionnaire supports this, as 55.3% of people agree that police are portrayed in a valiant light, whereas only 27% state they are seen as villains[19]. However, research has distinguished that this more likely influences "white people's" perception of reality, as they are "less likely to have a harmful interaction with police"[20]. Thus, due to the lack of first-hand real-world experiences of systemic injustice, which perpetuates racial prejudice[21], many viewers hold skewed beliefs about police brutality and racism[22]. Horton puts it simply that popular culture acts as "PR for a criminal justice system that is not the generally color-blind [and] fair… one seen on screen"[23]. This has monumental ramifications within society as white-dominated hegemonic power structures, which have the ability to make changes, may no longer see an urgency to address this perennial issue[24]. Thus, allowing for the new understanding that this increasing valorisation of police produces a confirmation bias amongst caucasian viewers, preserving their ignorance of racism.

Moreover, media outlets exaggerate and sensationalise higher-classified crimes, further skewing the views of the generalised other and, in turn, their social selves[25]. Studies show that this has resulted in around one-third of all television news featuring crime, "which is

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18 Primary Research: Content analysis, Dra.
19 Primary Research: Questionnaire Q6
20 A. Horton, '"The Uprisings Opened up the Door": The TV Cop Shows Confronting a Harmful Legacy' The Guardian (24 April 2021)
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/24/tv-police-cop-shows-hollywood-legacy> accessed 24 October 2024
21 A. Horton, '"The Uprisings Opened up the Door": The TV Cop Shows Confronting a Harmful Legacy' The Guardian (24 April 2021)
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/24/tv-police-cop-shows-hollywood-legacy> accessed 24 October 2024
22 S. Eschholz, 'The Media and Fear of Crime: A Survey of the Research', UF Law Scholarship Repository, (2022) <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/jlpp/vol9/iss1/2/> accessed 5 June 2025
23 A. Horton, '"The Uprisings Opened up the Door": The TV Cop Shows Confronting a Harmful Legacy' The Guardian (24 April 2021)
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/24/tv-police-cop-shows-hollywood-legacy> accessed 24 October 2024.
24 VJ. Callanan, 'Media Consumption, Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime: Examining Race/Ethnic Differences' (2012) 55 Sociological Perspectives 93
<https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2012.55.1.93> accessed 15 January 2025
25 K. Dowler & T. Fleming & S. Muzzatti, 'Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture' (2006) 48 Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice 837
<https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3138/cjccj.48.6.837?journalCode=cjccj> accessed 3 May 2025

overwhelmingly violent and focused on the most atypical" criminal offences [26]. One respondent to the questionnaire noted that "if it bleeds, it leads"[27], revealing the grotesque standards amongst media, whereby using violent crime as a headline has become normalised[28]. But constant reporting on felonies has problematic implications for societies across the globe[29], as research illuminates that over-dramatising crime fosters unnecessary fear and skewed perceptions of the untrustworthiness of governmental legal institutions[30]. This also applies in a broader sense to the entirety of popular culture[31]. The content analysis revealed the timeless nature of over-emphasising major crimes, as all podcasts and crime dramas reviewed, across the past four decades, overrepresented violent crime[32]. Therefore, in presenting a skewed version of reality, popular culture blurs the delineation between reality and erroneous depictions, causing viewers to expect and fear violent crime[33].

In a similar vein, within popular culture, perpetrators are commonly depicted in a stereotypical manner, as males who aren't Caucasian[34]. The idea of an archetypal criminal has Lombrosian overtones, in the sense that certain physical attributes condemn individuals to the "underside of society"[35]. This is revealed in the content analysis, as crime dramas always depicted the offender as male, excluding three instances[36]. Moreover, within the pilot episode of 'The Rookie', the training officer is visibly bigoted towards Mexican immigrants, which

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[26] VJ. Callanan, 'Media Consumption, Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime: Examining Race/Ethnic Differences' (2012) 55 Sociological Perspectives 93 <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2012.55.1.93> accessed 15 January 2025

[27] Primary Research: Questionnaire Q19 MX12

[28] D. Brennan, 'Child Commissioner Says Media Coverage of Youth Crime Is Creating More Fear' (2024) National Indigenous Times <https://nit.com.au/02-10-2024/14022/child-commissioner-says-media-coverage-of-youth-crime-is-creating-more-fear> accessed 16 January 2025

[29] K. Soothill, 'Crime and the Media: A Vicious Circle?' (1998) 70 AQ Australian Quarterly 24 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20637721> accessed 23 March 2025

[30] S. Vincent, 'Media Constructions of Crime.' The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 539, (1995) pp. 141–54. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1048402> accessed 8 November 2024

[31] S. Eschholz, 'The Media and Fear of Crime: A Survey of the Research', UF Law Scholarship Repository, (2022) <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/jlpp/vol9/iss1/2/> accessed 5 June 2025.

[32] Primary Research: Content analysis, Pod. Dra.

[33] K. Dowler & T. Fleming & S. Muzzatti, 'Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture' (2006) 48 Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice 837 <https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3138/cjccj.48.6.837?journalCode=cjccj> accessed 3 May 2025

[34] KM. Donovan & CF. Klahm, 'The Role of Entertainment Media in Perceptions of Police Use of Force' (2015) 42 Criminal Justice and Behavior 12 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0093854815604180> accessed 27 November 2024

[35] K. Dowler & T. Fleming & S. Muzzatti, 'Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture' (2006) 48 Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice 837 <https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3138/cjccj.48.6.837?journalCode=cjccj> accessed 3 May 2025

[36] Primary Research: Content analysis, Dra.

escalates to verbal abuse[37]. Generation Z, as the target for these misleading programs that support xenophobic attitudes, are much more susceptible to being swayed by this representation. This is evident in Figure 1, where Generation Z's responses are positively skewed, meaning they are more likely to agree that 'perpetrators are typically not Caucasians'[38]. Whereas, further analysis illuminates that Generation X has a wider array of responses, which can partly be attributed to their decreased exposure to crime growing up, allowing them to form their opinions separate from the generalised other. Thus, the media has a problematic amount of power over Generation Z's beliefs, and particularly instils fear into "white respondents who perceived that they were living in a community with a large percentage of blacks", mirroring the impact of racist netizen vernacular[39].
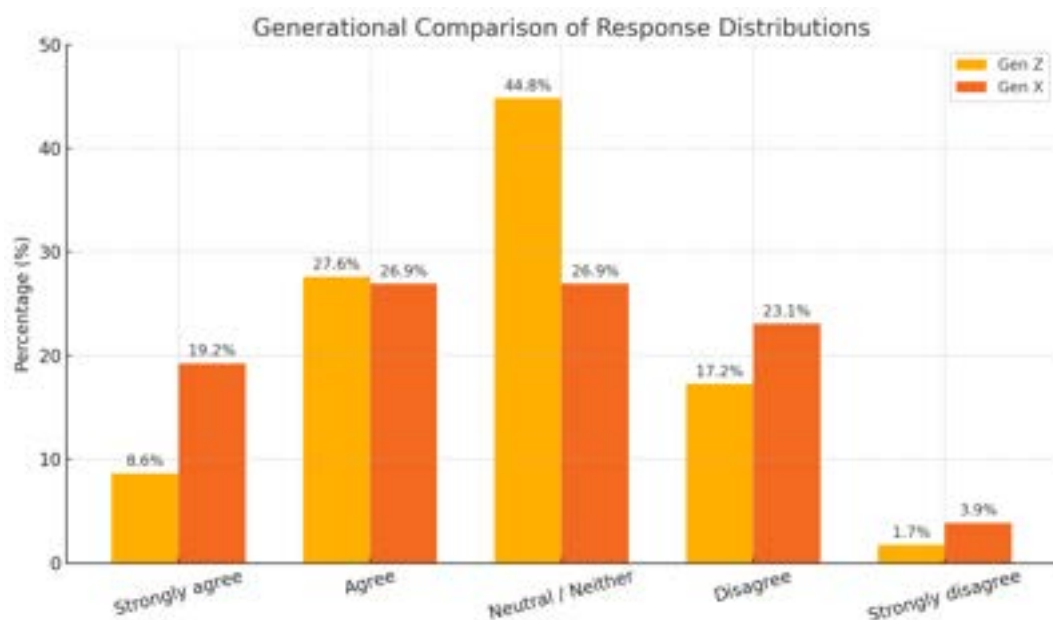

Figure 1: Questionnaire responses to the statement 'Perpetrators are typically not caucasian'[40]

Thus, popular culture has had a growing impact on individuals' perceptions of crime, criminals and the perceived level of danger within one's environment. It now significantly influences Generation Z's beliefs and worldviews, as the social self has become more valued and conformity with the generalised other is more common. Thus, additional studies are needed to determine how people filter different types of crime-related media to construct their

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[37] Primary Research: Content analysis, Dra. TR
[38] Primary Research: Questionnaire Q6
[39] VJ. Callanan, 'Media Consumption, Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime: Examining Race/Ethnic Differences' (2012) 55 Sociological Perspectives 93
<https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2012.55.1.93> accessed 15 January 2025
[40] Primary Research: Questionnaire Q6

perceptions about criminality and criminals[41]. With 76% of questionnaire respondents rating media's influence on people's perception of criminality a 7 out of 10 or above[42], it reveals the dangerous authority popular culture holds over young minds, as previously concluded[43]. Therefore, this societal concern needs to be further assessed to determine the implications of these altered, false beliefs about crime commonly held among the youth.

[41] K. Dowler & T. Fleming & S. Muzzatti, 'Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture' (2006) 48 Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice 837 <https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3138/cjccj.48.6.837?journalCode=cjccj> accessed 3 May 2025
[42] Primary Research: Questionnaire Q15
[43] R. Haslam & A. Illner & S. Chuang, 'Functional Brain Imaging: Evaluation of the Effects of Violent Media Exposure' (2003) 8 Paediatrics & Child Health 283 <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/8.5.283> accessed 23 March 2025

ARMCHAIR CRITIQUE

The immoral and unethical overinvolvement of untrained persons in criminal investigations.

In this increasingly technological age, the rise of diverse conduits of information has made crime-related content more accessible than ever, fueling the increasing popularity of true crime[44]. This involves untrained individuals reporting and investigating open or cold cases, illustrated in the content analysis, in which all non-fiction sources studied involved members of the public speculating on a suspect's culpability without official training [45]. In turn, ethical concerns have been raised about persons' immoral overinvolvement in police investigations and victims' or suspects' lives[46]. Conversely, the mythologisation of criminals in popular culture reframes the generalised others' opinion on crime, resulting in individuals blindly defending convicted felons. Despite this, unauthorised investigations can provide a powerful amount of media attention towards particular cases, affecting the expediency with which a verdict is given.

True crime has intrigued humans for centuries, yet "its sheer ubiquity"[47] in the modern era, has fuelled public fascination and thus its influence, which has "overshadowed [any] concern[ing]... effect[s] on society"[48]. The prevalence of this content is evident in the variety of platforms the sources from the content analysis were available on, such as *YouTube, Netflix, Dailymotion, Spotify and Google*[49]. This has allowed Generation Z to passively consume crime-related content, seen in their morbid use of "true crime shows and podcasts to relax"[50]. Conversely, 57.7% of Generation X respondents attribute their consumption of criminal content to educational purposes. Thus, this informal view of real-life crime amongst younger generations reveals the normalisation of untrained individuals openly discussing or

[44] K. Dowler & T. Fleming & S. Muzzatti, 'Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture' (2006) 48 Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice 837 <https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3138/cjccj.48.6.837?journalCode=cjccj> accessed 3 May 2025

[45] Primary Research: Content analysis

[46] P. Pantumsinchai, 'Armchair Detectives and the Social Construction of Falsehoods: An Actor–Network Approach' (2018) 21 Information, Communication & Society 761 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428654?needAccess=true> accessed 9 May 2025

[47] P. Lett, 'Opinion | Is Our True-Crime Obsession Doing More Harm than Good?', The New York Times (28 October 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/opinion/true-crime-petito.html#> accessed 3 May 2025

[48] J. Shults, 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association', National Police Association, (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025

[49] Primary Research: Content analysis

[50] Primary Research: Questionnaire, X26

investigating crime, contributing to the lack of delineation between entertainment and exploitation[51]. This creates a social self, led by the media's unbridled approach, that mitigates any and all ethical concerns with this problematic behaviour.

Subsequently, this has bred armchair detectives[52] who enjoy the "puzzle or mystery-solving aspect of the [true crime] genre", which contributes to their continual consumption of this invasive content[53]. This overinvolvement is evident in the Zodiac Killer's case, as amateur investigators' remain captivated by him, who claimed 37 victims, but despite the efforts of the police, has never been identified. Yet, 50 years after the first murder, an Australian mathematician, Sam Blake, solved one of Zodiac's notorious ciphers[54], highlighting the media's role in normalising uncredited "keyboard sleuths" becoming involved in ongoing official investigations[55]. The epidemic of feeling qualified, despite lacking accreditation, is evident in the questionnaire, where 20% of individuals labelled themselves as armchair detectives [56]. However, further analysis reveals that 75% of these respondents are Generation Z, illustrating a significant increase over time, which concerningly blurs curiosity and invasive and unauthorised investigation into open cases[57].

This rising obsession, in tandem with Generation Z's casual view of crime, which is clouding the danger of criminals, has resulted in both the mythologisation and romanticisation of perpetrators. Moreover, as previously concluded, technology, such as social media, has allowed young people to contribute to and follow cases with ease, leading to the creation of

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[51] J. Shults, 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association', National Police Association, (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025

[52] **Armchair detectives:** Individuals who engage in solving or speculating about criminal cases typically from the comfort of their home, without being professionally trained or involved in law enforcement.

[53] S. Roberts, 'Why Do We Love True Crime? The Phenomenon behind Our Obsession' (crimlawpractitioner26 April 2023) <https://www.crimlawpractitioner.org/post/why-do-we-love-true-crime-the-phenomenon-behind-our-obsession> accessed 23 October 2024

[54] M.Coggan, 'Zodiac Killer Code Cracked by Australian Mathematician Sam Blake More than 50 Years after First Murder' Australian Broadcasting Corporation (11 December 2020) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-12/zodiac-killer-code-cracked-by-australian-mathematician/12977342> accessed 5 May 2025.

[55] P. Pantumsinchai, 'Armchair Detectives and the Social Construction of Falsehoods: An Actor–Network Approach' (2018) 21 Information, Communication & Society 761 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428654?needAccess=true> accessed 9 May 2025

[56] Primary Research: Questionnaire, Q4

[57] Primary Research: Questionnaire, Q4

echo chambers, where confirmation biases are continuously reinforced[58]. A contemporary example of this is the Mendez brothers' trial, which resulted in the sentence of two counts of first-degree murder for the deaths of their parents. This case achieved intense media coverage, seen in the 13% of respondents who watched their documentary and the 60 Instagram accounts advocating for a retrial to reduce their sentence to manslaughter due to the allegations of their father's sexual abuse[59]. The resurgence of their case on social media has led to the creation of an international petition demanding "a fair and unbiased resentencing review for Erik and Lyle Menendez", magnifying their growing 'fanbase' due to their mythologised status[60]. Generation Z, in particular, has amplified this by romanticising these convicted murderers, as evident in Figure 2, which depicts photographs of both brothers surrounding the words 'I love you'. This idealisation is further seen throughout Netflix's recent documentary on their case, in which a reporter states, "they're too fine to go to prison!"[61]. Thus, the societal-wide conformity with untrained individuals' opinions signals a broader cultural shift towards leniency in sentencing, resulting from the media softening images of violent crime and perpetuating non-evidence-based assumptions[62]. Therefore, as expected, social media has allowed more untrained persons to openly discuss and circulate their thoughts on closed cases, leading to the perpetuation of dangerous echo chambers where "false information is propped up as the 'truth' "[63]. The research suggests that conformity with this herd mentality has problematic implications, as the media has the power to overshadow the heinous nature of crime and the violent tendencies of convicted criminals[64].

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[58] J. Shults, 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association', National Police Association, (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025

[59] Primary Research: Questionnaire, Q11

[60] Justice for Erik & Lyle, 'Justice for Erik & Lyle' Justice For Erik & Lyle, (2024) <https://www.justiceforerikandlyle.org/> accessed 8 May 2025

[61] Primary Research: Content analysis Doc, Menendez

[62] R. Ackland, 'The Teacher's Pet Podcast Likely Turbocharged the Wheels of Justice, but Judges Don't Approve' The Guardian (2 September 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/02/the-teachers-pet-podcast-likely-turbocharged-the-wheels-of-justice-but-judges-dont-approve> accessed 2 May 2025

[63] P. Pantumsinchai, 'Armchair Detectives and the Social Construction of Falsehoods: An Actor–Network Approach' (2018) 21 Information, Communication & Society 761 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428654?needAccess=true> accessed 9 May 2025

[64] J. Shults, 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association', National Police Association, (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025
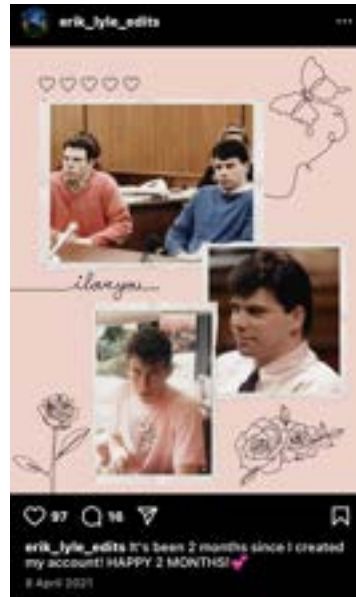
Figure 2: Instagram post, @erik_lyle_edits[65]

This conclusion prompts serious ethical concerns as privacy and confidentiality are breached to produce true crime content and theories. This is particularly seen in true crime podcasts, such as news.com.au's commentary on William Tyrell's case, involving his death at the age of four[66]. The producers visit William's past residence for an hour-long walk around the property, casually speaking of the young boy's tortured death and speculating on how the body was disposed: "behind these piles of leaves and sticks"[67]. The media has normalised intrusive reporting, yet the research suggests that the generalised others' conformity in ignoring ethical boundaries perpetuates this cycle of untrained persons immorally investigating cases. However, even more dangerously, as pointed out by a NSW police officer, reporters "are not armed with all the information, [which results in] assumption-based" conclusions that have the power to influence young minds, changing the source of authority from the ordained law enforcement to the ill-informed media. Concerningly, this overconfidence has grown to a global phenomenon, as Jean Murley, an American true crime scholar, states, "[we]'re a nation of crime experts now"[68], revealing the shift in society's perspectives on the serious, complex and official nature of policing. This consequently illustrates how "popular representations of crime [are] eroding moral

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[65] Erik and Lyle edits [@erik_lyle_edits] (2021, April 8) A romanticised collage of the Lyle and Erik [Photograph], Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CNX5ajGlbsa/>
[66] Primary Research: Content analysis, Pod, WT
[67] Primary Research: Content analysis, Pod, WT
[68] P. Lett, 'Opinion | Is Our True-Crime Obsession Doing More Harm than Good?', The New York Times (28 October 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/opinion/true-crime-petito.html#> accessed 3 May 2025

principles"[69] through encouraging invasive and unauthorised analysis of criminal cases, which, if continued, may devalue the work of police officers and deprioritise their opinions within society[70].

However, in rare cases, mass media attention or armchair detectives have made a positive impact on the progression or outcome of judicial rulings. Michael Lewis, a NSW police officer, emphasised the importance of the media to "give exposure to something that may have fallen out of people's eyes"[71]. This is evident in 2022, when "the media [was] responsible for applying a bit of gas" to the otherwise stagnated Christopher Dawson case[72]. This ultimately, after 40 years, resulted in a guilty conviction, meaning "the podcast… [contributed in] bring[ing] down a killer"[73], which suggests the media's positive influence over this particular judicial ruling. This effect is supported by researcher Hanych, who, through his various interviews, confirms "public opinion", which is constructed by the media, "is a major extralegal influence on judicial decisionmaking"[74]. In turn, this has pushed law enforcement officers to treat civilians and media attention as an asset in ongoing or even closed investigations. In response, the NSW Police have created a Crime Stoppers unit, which receives and records phone calls from the general public who believe they have information about criminal cases[75]. Stemming from the recognition that "rather than being insular and separate, [police] need to integrate" into society, this mindset has the power to rebuild institutional trust previously lost from overconfident young people believing that they are just as qualified as an officer[76].

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[69] Primary research: Questionnaire, Q19 FZ
[70] J. Shults, 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association' National Police Association (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025
[71] Primary Research: Expert Interview
[72] R. Ackland, 'The Teacher's Pet Podcast Likely Turbocharged the Wheels of Justice, but Judges Don't Approve' The Guardian (2 September 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/02/the-teachers-pet-podcast-likely-turbocharged-the-wheels-of-justice-but-judges-dont-approve> accessed 2 May 2025
[73] R. Ackland, 'The Teacher's Pet Podcast Likely Turbocharged the Wheels of Justice, but Judges Don't Approve' The Guardian (2 September 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/02/the-teachers-pet-podcast-likely-turbocharged-the-wheels-of-justice-but-judges-dont-approve> accessed 2 May 2025
[74] M. Hanych & H. Smekal & J. Benák, 'The Influence of Public Opinion and Media on Judicial Decision-Making: Elite Judges' Perceptions and Strategies' (2023) 14 International Journal for Court Administration <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.528> accessed 15 June 2025
[75] Primary Research: Expert Interview
[76] Primary Research: Expert Interview

Therefore, not only is this increased media coverage on crime impacting the generalised others' perspectives, but, through this gradual process of normalisation, it is also impacting individuals' actions. Within society, in particular among reporters, overconfidence has grown, increasing the number of armchair detectives across generations[77]. The research highlights the serious ethical oversights in much of this globalised content, which needs to be addressed in the near future to protect victims and their families from "doxxing and [the] dissemination of private information"[78]. Despite this, police are attempting to integrate rather than remain disconnected from society, as positive outcomes have resulted from media attention[79]. However, to ensure privacy and confidentiality are maintained during unauthorised investigations, laws should be firmly established to restrict unqualified reporters from making misleading, non-evidence-based conclusions that have the power to create echo chambers of fabricated theories[80].

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[77] J. Shults, 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association', National Police Association, (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025

[78] P. Pantumsinchai, 'Armchair Detectives and the Social Construction of Falsehoods: An Actor–Network Approach' (2018) 21 Information, Communication & Society 761 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428654?needAccess=true> accessed 9 May 2025

[79] Primary Research: Expert Interview

[80] P. Pantumsinchai, 'Armchair Detectives and the Social Construction of Falsehoods: An Actor–Network Approach' (2018) 21 Information Communication & Society 761 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428654> accessed 9 May 2025

FEAR or FASCINATION

Has overexposure to crime at a young age created paranoia or desensitisation?

The ever-prevalent issue of overreporting on crime has not only influenced society's perceptions and actions but also individuals' minds and thoughts[81]. Within these echo chambers, fear is perpetuated, creating mass panic. Sarah Eschholz, author of 'The Media and Fear of Crime', attributes this to "pack journalism", where the media focuses on certain crimes or cases, reinforcing people's confirmation bias held within the social self[82]. In turn, this has resulted in increased paranoia, particularly in parents, who, due to their skewed perception of reality, display disproportionate concern for their child's safety. Ironically, it is the younger generation who are most susceptible to becoming desensitised to violent crime because they are overexposed to criminal activity in mediatised popular culture[83]. Conformity to the normalisation of this unethical content can result in altered brain development, promoting youth violence.

The constant news cycle has the power to foster unwarranted fear, and society's conformity with this ignites mass panic. This is reinforced in my expert interview, where Police Constable Michael Lewis states that the "24-hour media cycle" causes a "perception of fear", even though "[Australians] are living in a very safe… society"[84]. Thus, overexposure to "unrelenting news coverage [on] notorious crimes" is the root cause of "irrational fear"[85]. However, Miss Callanan from the University of Akron synthesised that the amount of content consumed impacts the extent of paranoia felt, as illustrated in her finding of "a direct correlation between the fear of crime and regular consumption of television news and crime-based reality TV"[86]. This conclusion is further supported in the questionnaire, in which a Generation Z respondent states that "access to the internet and this constant stream of

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[81] S. Vincent, 'Media Constructions of Crime.' The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 539, (1995) pp. 141–54. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1048402> accessed 8 November 2024

[82] S. Eschholz, 'The Media and Fear of Crime: A Survey of the Research' UF Law Scholarship Repository (2022) <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/jlpp/vol9/iss1/2> accessed 5 June 2025

[83] R. Haslam & A. Illner & S. Chuang, 'Functional Brain Imaging: Evaluation of the Effects of Violent Media Exposure' (2003) 8 Paediatrics & Child Health 283 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2792685/> accessed 23 March 2025

[84] Primary Research: Expert Interview

[85] T. Brito, 'Paranoid Parents, Phantom Menaces, and the Culture of Fear' SSRN (2021) <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3911340> accessed 5 June 2025.

[86] VJ. Callanan, 'Media Consumption, Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime: Examining Race/Ethnic Differences' (2012) 55 Sociological Perspectives 93 <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2012.55.1.93> accessed 15 January 2025

news of horrible things happening can make [them] feel paranoid"[87]. Therefore, these findings uncover the dangerous power wielded by content producers, whose reports don't simply reflect societal fears but amplify them, shaping our psychological and emotional responses. Paradoxically, this traps the generalised other in a continuous loop, in which their man-made fear prompts viewers to further engage with this anxiety-producing content about crime, entrenching their misguided confirmation bias. This false fear is supported by Eschholz's "cultivation hypothesis", which discusses the way media can "cultivate an image of the world as a scary place", even if evidence of this has only been provided through a screen[88]. Yet, because of constant "pack journalism", these anxieties reverberate through the echo chamber of modern society, resulting in "moral [and mass] panic"[89]. This paranoia has taken various shapes in different cultures. In Generation Z, it has led "68%" of respondents to a questionnaire "less likely to go out", emphasising how falsified fear has become genuine and is manifesting in people's behaviours[90]. Therefore, these findings suggest that societal citizens adopt this perceived fear, which could hinder younger generations' willingness and ability to become fully fledged and functioning individuals in their communities.

The sense of paranoia resulting from an increased awareness of criminal activity can be seen specifically in Generation X's adoption of cosseting[91] parenting techniques. Inflammatory reporting prompted 55% of Generation X respondents to have experienced some extent of paranoia[92]. This is further perpetuated in "older communities" (those born from 1979 onwards) by conformity with the "group mentality", as their fears are confirmed by the falsified ideas of other persons[93]. Dechlan Brennan refers to this as "panic without purpose", and, significantly, the media coverage provides "no solution" to these proposed threats[94]. This research points to troubling abuses of power, in which governmental systems appeal to

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[87] Primary Research: Questionnaire
[88] S. Eschholz, 'The Media and Fear of Crime: A Survey of the Research' UF Law Scholarship Repository (2022) <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/jlpp/vol9/iss1/2> accessed 5 June 2025
[89]S. Eschholz, 'The Media and Fear of Crime: A Survey of the Research' UF Law Scholarship Repository (2022) <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/jlpp/vol9/iss1/2> accessed 5 June 2025
[90] Youth Endowment Fund, '70% of Teens See Real-Life Violence on Social Media, Reveals New Research | Youth Endowment Fund', Youth Endowment Fund (25 November 2024) <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/70-of-teens-see-real-life-violence-on-social-media-reveals-new-research/> accessed 5 June 2025
[91] **Cosseting:** to care and protect in an overindulgent way.
[92] Primary Research: Questionnaire
[93] Primary Research: Expert interview
[94] D. Brennan, 'Child Commissioner Says Media Coverage of Youth Crime Is Creating More Fear' National Indigenous Times (2024) <https://nit.com.au/02-10-2024/14022/child-commissioner-says-media-coverage-of-youth-crime-is-creating-more-fear> accessed 16 January 2025

Generation X voters by ensuring policies that will further protect their children from perceived dangers, cyclically espoused by news sources or media. This is verified by Tonya Brito, who writes, "Parents' legitimate concerns about potential danger to their children have been magnified by countless media reports of violence to children and [the] government"[95]. In turn, this has had pronounced implications on the parenting style of Generation X to their predominantly Generation Z children, mainly manifesting as 'helicopter parenting'[96]. One Generation X respondent in the questionnaire states, "parents often don't let their kids walk or catch the bus to school like they did a few decades ago"[97], exemplifying a lack of freedom and responsibility. Similarly, caretakers' belief that crime is "omnipresent" could plausibly result in the unhelpful and restrictive idea "that even briefly losing track of a child is inherently dangerous"[98]. Unfortunately, the impact of helicopter parenting, particularly in the early developmental period of a child's life, is that this fear could be imparted to their children. This hypothesis is supported in the questionnaire as 70.5% of Generation Z experienced paranoia in relation to crime, and usually to a greater extent. The increase of 15.5% (compared to Generation X)[99], is consequential, as if the cycle of fear further increases in coming generations, societies at a macro level will become more reclusive and sceptical of authoritarian structures[100]. Ultimately, this may manifest in increased protests and public displays of discontent in legal and political rulings as trust in institutions dwindles[101]. Conversely, it could foster societies that remain silent in the face of authority, in fear of speaking out.

On the contrary, another response to the oversaturation of crime-related content is desensitisation, particularly affecting Generation Z, who have been exposed to violent media

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[95] T. Brito, 'Paranoid Parents, Phantom Menaces, and the Culture of Fear' SSRN (2021) <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3911340> accessed 5 June 2025
[96] **Helicopter parenting:** when a parent is excessively over involved and controlling over their child's everyday life
[97] Primary Research: Questionnaire
[98] T. Brito, 'Paranoid Parents, Phantom Menaces, and the Culture of Fear' SSRN (2021) <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3911340> accessed 5 June 2025
[99] Primary Research: Questionnaire
[100] S. Roberts, 'Why Do We Love True Crime? The Phenomenon behind Our Obsession' Criminal Law Practitioner (26 April 2023) <https://www.crimlawpractitioner.org/post/why-do-we-love-true-crime-the-phenomenon-behind-our-obsession> accessed 23 October 2024
[101] M. Hanych & H. Smekal & J. Benák, 'The Influence of Public Opinion and Media on Judicial Decision-Making: Elite Judges' Perceptions and Strategies' (2023) 14 International Journal for Court Administration <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.528> accessed 15 June 2025

coverage from a young age[102]. From the questionnaire, 77.1% of Generation Z respondents admitted to experiencing desensitisation to major crimes, with a notable change since Generation X of a 17.8% increase over time[103]. The Youth Endowment Fund found that a "quarter of violent content seen by teenage children is pushed by social media platforms", attributing to a significant amount of the digital generation's eroded empathy to their addiction to communication technologies[104]. Thus, "the eerie lack of reality"[105] in which the news and social media present violent crime has irreparable damage to young people's emotional sensitivity, eventually resulting in "the devaluing of human life"[106].

The implications of adolescent desensitisation play out on a macro scale, despite this mindset occurring at a micro level, as research has found evidence that links it to youth violence[107]. Further findings by the Youth Endowment Fund support this rationale as "nearly two-fifths (39%)" of teenage respondents said that seeing brutality online "made them more likely to carry a weapon" and 64% said that "social media play[s] a role" in orchestrating "in-person violence"[108]. Thus, this reveals evidence that overexposure to violent criminal activity in the media has the power to normalise sadism and desensitise young people not only to the "true heinousness of crimes" but also to the legal consequences of their actions[109]. This ultimately could increase youth crime and psychologically hinder Generation Z's empathy and emotional sensitivity[110]. This has been affirmed by Haslam, an academic researcher who

[102] J. Shults, 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association', National Police Association, (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025

[103] Primary Research: Questionnaire

[104] Youth Endowment Fund, '70% of Teens See Real-Life Violence on Social Media, Reveals New Research | Youth Endowment Fund', Youth Endowment Fund (25 November 2024) <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/70-of-teens-see-real-life-violence-on-social-media-reveals-new-research/> accessed 5 June 2025

[105] R. Ackland, 'The Teacher's Pet Podcast Likely Turbocharged the Wheels of Justice, but Judges Don't Approve' The Guardian (2 September 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/02/the-teachers-pet-podcast-likely-turbocharged-the-wheels-of-justice-but-judges-dont-approve> accessed 2 May 2025

[106] J. Shults, 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association', National Police Association, (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025

[107] K. Dowler & T. Fleming & SL. Muzzatti, 'Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture' (2006) 48 Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice 837 <https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3138/cjccj.48.6.837?journalCode=cjccj> accessed 3 May 2025

[108] Youth Endowment Fund, '70% of Teens See Real-Life Violence on Social Media, Reveals New Research | Youth Endowment Fund', Youth Endowment Fund (25 November 2024) <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/70-of-teens-see-real-life-violence-on-social-media-reveals-new-research/> accessed 5 June 2025

[109] Primary Research: Questionnaire, Z

[110] N. Carnagey & C. Anderson & B. Bartholow, 'Media Violence and Social Neuroscience' (2007) 16 Current Directions in Psychological Science 178 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00499.x> accessed 5 June 2025

states, "It is no longer debatable whether the child or adolescent viewer's exposure to violent media causes increased aggressive behaviour and contributes to youth violence"[111]. This strong conclusion is based on observed neurological changes in adolescents' brains, revealing that "violent visual images may have a damaging effect on the frontal lobe function of young viewers", speaking to the irreparable damage desensitisation can have[112]. The Association of Psychological Science utilises the GAM[113] model to explain how internal input can affect external impulsive action[114]. Analysis of Figure 3 clearly shows that "violent media could affect one, two, or all three aspects of a person's present internal state", which therefore directly manifests in impulsive and possibly brutal action within a social encounter[115]. Therefore, GAM exemplifies how over-reporting of violent crime, despite being seen as an innocent money grab by media producers[116], may detrimentally result in an overly aggressive and thus more crime-inclined generation[117].

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[111]R. Haslam & A. Illner & S. Chuang, 'Functional Brain Imaging: Evaluation of the Effects of Violent Media Exposure' (2003) 8 Paediatrics & Child Health 283
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2792685/> accessed 23 March 2025
[112]R. Haslam & A. Illner & S. Chuang, 'Functional Brain Imaging: Evaluation of the Effects of Violent Media Exposure' (2003) 8 Paediatrics & Child Health 283
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2792685/> accessed 23 March 2025
[113] **GAM:** General Aggression model (seen in figure 3)
[114] N. Carnagey & C. Anderson & B. Bartholow, 'Media Violence and Social Neuroscience' (2007) 16 Current Directions in Psychological Science 178
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00499.x> accessed 5 June 2025
[115] N. Carnagey & C. Anderson & B. Bartholow, 'Media Violence and Social Neuroscience' (2007) 16 Current Directions in Psychological Science 178
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00499.x> accessed 5 June 2025
[116] D. Brennan, 'Child Commissioner Says Media Coverage of Youth Crime Is Creating More Fear' (2024) National Indigenous Times
<https://nit.com.au/02-10-2024/14022/child-commissioner-says-media-coverage-of-youth-crime-is-creating-more-fear> accessed 16 January 2025
[117] S. Vincent, 'Media Constructions of Crime.' The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 539, (1995) pp. 141–54. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1048402> accessed 8 November 2024
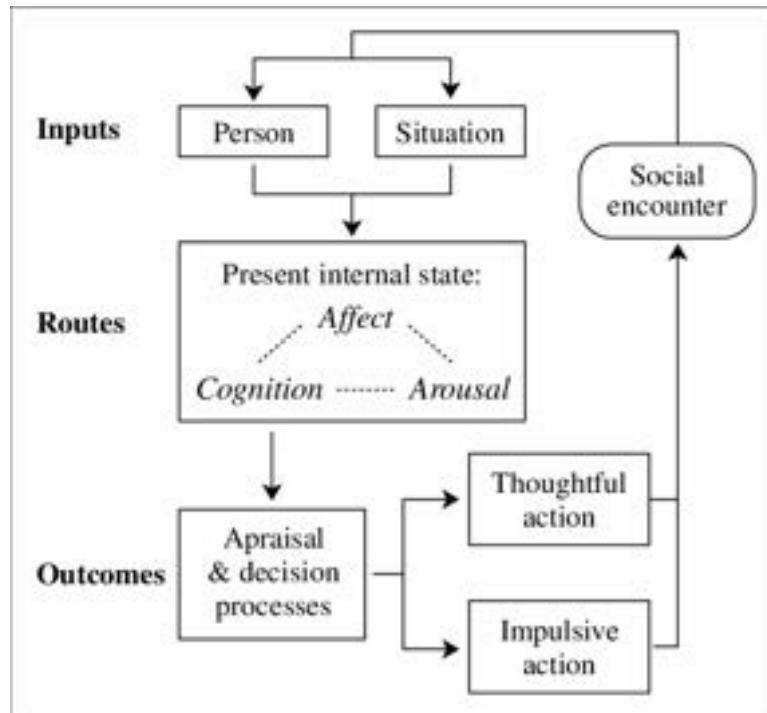
Figure 3: GAM model[118]

Thus, the ever-expanding digital world and continued media frenzy relating to major crime have problematically resulted in fear, paranoia, desensitisation and violent tendencies[119]. Paranoid parenting has raised a partly risk-averse generation of young people who grew up inside the echo-chamber of falsified fears, inflamed by "pack journalism"[120]. On the contrary, some young people have instead adopted a tolerance to brutal imagery and weaponry, which evidence has suggested, despite being heavily linked to violent video games, alters the internal functioning of individuals' brains. Therefore, more specific research into the impact of continually viewing major crime is essential to confirm this correlation with youth violence to ensure societies remain safe and foster cohesion[121].

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[118]N. Carnagey & C. Anderson & B. Bartholow, 'Media Violence and Social Neuroscience' (2007) 16 Current Directions in Psychological Science 178
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00499.x> accessed 5 June 2025
[119] K. Soothill, 'Crime and the Media: A Vicious Circle?' (1998) 70 AQ: Australian Quarterly 24
<https://doi.org/10.2307/20637721> accessed 23 March 2025
[120]S. Eschholz, 'The Media and Fear of Crime: A Survey of the Research' UF Law Scholarship Repository (2022) <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/jlpp/vol9/iss1/2> accessed 5 June 2025
[121] K. Dowler & T. Fleming & SL. Muzzatti, 'Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture' (2006) 48 Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice 837
<https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3138/cjccj.48.6.837?journalCode=cjccj> accessed 3 May 2025

CONCLUSION

So, does this content have the power to kill us? Not quite.

But it might have the power to murder some young minds. Why?

Because they believe that this content is 'killer'.

This PIP revealed to me the dangerous power that the media, popular culture and government inaction have in reshaping my thinking if I'm not vigilant. The problematic implications of obsession with true crime content have only become more apparent. I have personally been convicted of my tendency to unethically watch cases and make judgments, despite my unqualification.

I recognised that at times I have fallen victim to the echo chambers that have normalised armchair detectives in our society. As a result of my confirmation bias, popular culture has ultimately altered my perception of crime and criminals to become one that is casual and indifferent. Through this research, I was able to confirm my hypothesis that the media has abused its influence over society's perceptions by oversaturating its content with violent crime, impacting young people's expectations and actions due to their overexposure from childhood.

As I wrote about popular culture's control over the generalised others' beliefs about criminal activity, I became convinced of Generation Z's susceptibility to external influences such as the media, due to their strong desire to conform to their peers. Importantly, chapter two illuminated the implications of this homogeneity, as society has gradually normalised the immoral invasion of privacy by armchair detectives. During chapters one and two, the content analysis aligned with the media's broader curation of content, which continues to foster fear and desensitisation within individuals. Yet, chapter three, highlighted the deeper paranoia and violent behaviours that arose from consistently indulging in this brain-altering content.

This topic will only grow in relevance to society as those in Generation Z become those in positions of power and authority. If these issues are left unaddressed, the complications and skewed beliefs that are unfolding amongst the current younger audience, who frequently

consume this falsified media, may be passed down to future generations, thus perpetuating more secluded and fearful societies despite decreasing crime rates.

Moreover, as technology continues to invade all aspects of our lives, social media will provide numerous opportunities for individuals to unethically and unnecessarily promote their opinions on police investigations. This may have detrimental effects on respect for law enforcement officers' official and evidence-based conclusions and may begin to impact rulings given in court. Additionally, frequent viewing of violent criminal behaviour, particularly glorified on social media platforms, has been proven to increase rates of youth violence.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that crime in the media is merely a factor in these detrimental macro-level youth violence issues. But the evidence gathered in this report does strongly correlate increased consumption of criminal-related content to altered perceptions, behaviours and worldviews. So in a world obsessed with real-life crime, maybe the real mystery that needs our amateur investigation is why we can't look away? Maybe we need to before it kills our minds or raises a generation of killers.

ANNOTATED REFERENCES

Primary

Questionnaire (Qualitative and Quantitative), published 13th of November 2024:

The questionnaire was essential in gaining initial insights into the topic by providing both qualitative and quantitative data outlining the general public's opinion about the extent to which crime in the media affects society. Before it was sent out, an editing process occurred to fix minor grammatical errors and the questions were altered to improve their clarity. An ethical disclaimer was also added to the beginning of the questionnaire, providing vital definitions and reassuring participants that all personal information will remain confidential by presenting everyone as a deidentified voice. It included 19 questions, 9 of which were open and 10 were closed; these were all relevant to a particular chapter in my PIP to ensure I could incorporate the general findings into each chapter. For example, some questions included 'To what extent do you agree that there has been a large spike in media coverage on crime throughout your life?', 'Have you ever been an 'armchair detective'', and 'To what extent have you experienced paranoia and desensitisation due to the oversaturation of crime in the media?, which are applicable to chapters one, two and three, respectively. Thus, this wide variety of questions provided me with invaluable data to include throughout the entirety of my PIP. Moreover, there were 87 responses to the questionnaire that improved the reliability of the retrieved and analysed statistics. However, some questions were answered poorly due to a lack of understanding and broad statements, despite my prior editing, but more refinement could have decreased the prevalence of vague answers. This error may relate to my personal bias, as my desire to receive a specific response may have skewed and convoluted the writing of the questions. Moreover, the questionnaire was utilised in to synthesis about the generational differences, yet only 30% of respondents were Generation X. Although results remained anonymous, the demographic of each respondent was likely high-income families from the Northern Beaches, allowing greater access to true-crime content. Finally, almost 70% of individuals were from Generation Z and white females, which may affect the validity of these results. This questionnaire illuminated clear changes in perceptions of crime and risk over time, but requires more variety amongst respondents to confirm these findings, and is supplemented by other secondary sources.

Content analysis (Qualitative and Quantitative), conducted from the 16th of February to the 24th of April 2025:

The content analysis provided qualitative and quantitative data on how popular culture has changed its representations and beliefs about crime over the past 45 years (1973-2024). This involved the exploration of four different types of media through the analysis of three different sources that accounted for the changes from Generation X to Generation Z. The aspects of popular culture I investigated were documentaries, news articles, podcasts and crime dramas. In doing so, this provided a broad perspective on popular culture through analysis of sources such as News.com.au's William Tryell podcast (2024) and Kate Loves a Mystery (1979). Through this, I was able to identify trends of both continuity and change which I included in each chapter of my PIP. In particular, I discovered that all true-crime media examined covered unsolved cases, prompting the audience members to become part of the investigation, which was included in chapters one and two. Similar to this finding, qualitative analysis involves collecting quotes and observations based on a coding sheet, which included topics such as 'the role of the general public in the investigation' and 'evidence of desensitisation'. Additionally, I recorded quantitative results in a table by tallying the perpetrators' race and gender, as well as the presentations of the police as heroes or villains. For example, over the span of the content analysis, crime dramas had a 350% increase in heroising police officers. Together, these displayed the continuing and evolving influences on Generation X in comparison to Generation Z, relating closely to my cross-cultural component. However, when recording results from these sources, personal bias was inevitable as I set out to compile certain results which would support my arguments, skewing my perception and thus must be acknowledged. So despite my efforts to remain neutral, the reliability and accuracy of these observations may be impacted. To improve the accuracy of my observations, I ensured they were supported by secondary evidence before including it in my PIP. Yet, this method was highly valid, as sources were gathered from many platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, Dailymotion, Spotify and Google, and the media spanned across a large period of time. This research method provided me with examples to support my argument, but it took over 20 hours to thoroughly complete it and analyse the results.

Expert interview, conducted on the 21st of March 2025:

The expert interview was conducted with Michael Lewis, a NSW police officer who was representing himself rather than the NSW police force. To prepare for this, the questions were prepared and edited pre-emptively using teacher feedback to ensure I followed ethical guidelines. Moreover, to navigate the difficult NSW police confidentiality laws in an ethical manner, I wrote up a contract which was signed by both the interviewer (myself) and the interviewee, outlining that his information provided would solely be presented as his subjective voice. When conducting the interview, I began with a similar ethical disclaimer and received verbal agreement to include Officer Lewis's name and to record the process for only transcription purposes. He then responded to a series of questions in his unofficial capacity, but it provided an expert voice on the way crime in the media has affected real police work and how this has changed across generations. This in-person interview included 9 questions, such as 'Have you ever received unhelpful or useful information from the general public trying to assist in criminal investigations?' and 'Among younger generations, have you observed signs of desensitisation to violent and major crimes due to increased media consumption?'. These questions were targeted towards chapters two and three and provided real-world experiences to support my argument. However, other questions were helpful to the first chapter, as Officer Lewis spoke about the media's role or lack thereof, in altering the public's perceptions of crime and criminals. His opinions proved to be valuable counter-arguments to some of my rigid views, challenging me to explore alternate avenues in my research. Overall, it provided qualitative information, modern-day examples and quotes on the things that have remained or changed throughout this officer's 35-year career, revealing the generational shifts in attitudes towards crime and law enforcement. However, this is a single voice that doesn't represent the police force in an official capacity, and his responses may have included bias, which could impact the validity of his observations. Yet, due to Officer Lewis's long career and social and culturally relevant examples, the method remains valid. The accuracy of my findings from this research method is strong, since I ensured to conduct further secondary investigation before utilising any information in my synthesis. This primary method proved helpful in providing an expert opinion within my triangulation, but was a singular perspective on a globalised issue and thus requires other research to prove its reliability.

Secondary

Journal Articles

Brito T, '***Paranoid Parents, Phantom Menaces, and the Culture of Fear***' (2021) Ssrn.com
<https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3911340> accessed 5 June 2025

This journal article discussed the specific but dangerous notion that parents have grown to become overprotective due to the media's over-representation of violent crime. This source introduced me to the idea of media-driven fear, which prompted the creation of the first section of chapter three, relating to paranoia and cosetting parenting. To explore this notion, the author conducted three case studies, relating to child sexual abuse, child abductions and school shootings. All of the above cases resulted in public fear and hysteria, which I synthesised with other findings to conclude that this has contributed to the increased prevalence of 'helicopter parenting'. Yet, powerfully, Brito declares this as "irrational fear", which is perpetuated and regularly confirmed by media and government authorities, proving to be a vital quote in chapter three. These ideas link closely to the key terms in my PIP of 'echo chambers' and 'conformity', and thus proved helpful in the construction of my arguments. Moreover, this journal article was published in 2021, and so the validity of Brito's dissertation endures. In a similar vein, the author is an assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School, allowing the source to be considered reliable. However, despite the use of the Oxford footnote system, a reference list isn't provided after the completion of her report, decreasing the accuracy of Brito's work. To remedy this, further secondary research was conducted in order to validate the quotes and information before it was included in chapter three. Therefore, this source was essential in the creation of my PIP, but its specificity restricted its versatility.

Callanan VJ, '***Media Consumption, Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime: Examining Race/Ethnic Differences***' (2012) 55 Sociological Perspectives 93
<https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2012.55.1.93> accessed 15 January 2025

Callanan's journal article, 'Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime', explores the way the media influences beliefs on criminal activity in relation to race and ethnicity. The results from their research methodologies found a direct correlation between the fear of crime and regular consumption of television news and crime-based reality TV across all ethnic groups,

highlighting this universal consequence discussed throughout chapters one and three of my PIP. Callanan attributed this effect to the desire for 'perceived realism' within the media content itself; this idea became essential in the development of my argument in chapter one. The author also concluded that the media are constantly portraying hegemonic constructions of crime, furthering white people's confirmation bias, relevant to chapter one. Moreover, this source can be considered somewhat valid as it was written in 2012, meaning some content may be outdated, such as its focus on television, which is no longer the leading force of influence on younger generations. On the other hand, this article came from JSTOR, a reputable site and was developed by the University of Akron, further increasing its reliability. No bias was evident throughout the piece, which allowed me to confidently quote and reference it in every chapter of my PIP. Yet, it majorly focused on race and ethnicity, which is only relevant to a paragraph in chapter one, but its broad stroke conclusions provided invaluable insights into my topic. This article also offered sophisticated language, which I utilised to elevate my discussion whilst simultaneously prompting me to conduct further research into how the type of media influences the extent to which individuals' perceptions of crime are altered.

Carnagey NL & Anderson CA & Bartholow BD, '*Media Violence and Social Neuroscience*' (2007) 16 Current Directions in Psychological Science 178 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00499.x> accessed 5 June 2025

This journal article, 'Media Violence and Social Neuroscience', provided invaluable insights into the changes in the brain's functioning when exposed to aggressive content. It focused mainly on the impacts of video games on young minds, as much of the research in this field does. Since this was the case, it proved difficult to apply this piece to my broader topic about the impact of popular culture's portrayal of crime on individuals' behaviours. Yet, it utilised a relevant theory known as The General Aggression Model, relating to how external influences may affect our internal sense of self and ultimately our actions. This aligned perfectly with chapter three where I raised the issue that exposure to violent crime may prompt youth violence. Thus, the information I received from this source was reliable because it was retrieved from the trusted scholarly database of Sage Journals and published by the Association for Psychological Science. More so, each of the authors are academic researchers for various universities, increasing reliability. Conversely, the accuracy of their work is limited as a result of their minimal references, however it was partly backed up by their own

research. This may have resulted in a minimal bias as the academics willfully acknowledge the need for further research in this area. Similarly, validity remains only moderate as this forward-looking journal article was published in 2007, meaning that new findings would not be included in their work. Consequently, this piece provided helpful information in a small but significant aspect of my PIP, deeming it somewhat useful.

Donovan KM & Klahm CF, '***The Role of Entertainment Media in Perceptions of Police Use of Force***' (2015) 42 Criminal Justice and Behavior 12
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0093854815604180> accessed 27 November 2024

This resource was minimally helpful to my PIP. It is a Political science study that utilised a questionnaire and extensive content analysis to explore 'The Role of Entertainment Media in Perceptions of Police Use of Force'. In particular, it discussed how crime dramas have impacted citizens' perceptions and attitudes towards crime, policing and criminal activity. Donovan spoke of the unrealistic portrayal of violent crimes being the majority of police work, and the police force commonly being used against an offender. This was analysed in reference to The Mentalist (season 4), Criminal Minds (season 7), and NCIS (season 9). This article links to the important theme of how popular culture influences societal ideological changes, a key idea in chapter one of my PIP. Their statistics about how indulging in crime dramas makes people believe the police are more efficient support my hypothesis for chapter one. On the other hand, the more qualitative conclusions about how police brutality is normalised in crime entertainment ignited the focus of desensitisation, resulting in violence in chapter three of my PIP. However, this resource does include bias, specifically towards proving their hypothesis, but this is addressed in the section on limitations, displaying ethical research. The source was written by Kathleen M. Donovan, an Assistant Professor at St John Fisher College and the statements made within this study are supported by various other scholars, making this a reliable source. Moreover, the journal article was also valid as it provided a detailed argument thoroughly backed up by statistical and qualitative data.

Dowler K & Fleming T & Muzzatti SL, '***Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture***' (2006) 48 Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice 837
<https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3138/cjccj.48.6.837?journalCode=cjccj> accessed 3 May 2025

Ken Dowler's journal article displays the interrelated relationship between public perception of crime and criminals and the image painted in popular culture. It outlined the salient nature of violent crime in the media which leads to the creation of 'mega cases' that transcend international borders. Dowler attributes this widespread phenomenon to the sensationalised content and stereotypical portrayals which appease the targeted audience, who are regularly Generation Z. He also acknowledges the immense power this falsified content has over society and the way "social-control agencies" such as politicians and police can utilise the media to unethically generate fear or mass hysteria. This academic work correlates strongly with my chosen topic and thus was relevant to all chapters of my PIP. In chapter one, I discuss the archetypal portrayal of crime and criminals, and in the second, I make reference to Dowler's allusion to the newly accessible multimodal content relating to unlawful acts. Whereas, in chapter three, his conclusions about how consuming this dangerous content "contribute(s) directly to the production of crime" guided my argument and prompted further research. Moreover, the scholarly voice sustained throughout this piece led to minimal bias being displayed due to its heavily research-based argument. It was written in 2007, meaning this source can be considered mostly valid, although secondary research should be conducted into more recent findings. Yet, this journal article is reliable as it is both peer-reviewed and published via the University of Toronto. However, throughout his writing Dowler acknowledged that many scholarly conclusions including his, can only be considered propositions as there are limited statistical, evidence-based investigations, proving the urgency of my PIP. Overall, this journal article acknowledged the importance of my research and assisted my research journey.

Eschholz S, '*The Media and Fear of Crime: A Survey of the Research*', UF Law Scholarship Repository, (2022) <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/jlpp/vol9/iss1/2/> accessed 5 June 2025

This source from the 'Journal of Law and Public Policy', titled 'The Media and Fear of Crime: A Survey of the Research', allowed me to gain valuable insights and conclusions that support my hypothesis. Professor Sarah Eschholz published this article through the University of Florida and has written countless articles about crime, the media and its impact on societal citizens, proving to be a consistent and well-informed voice in this area of study. In turn, influencing the reliability of her findings within this piece. In this particular article, Eschholz surveyed decades of research to determine the true effect of various forms of media on the fear of crime. Notably, she found correlations between the amount of news content

consumed on television and the extent of the resulting paranoia, supported by Gerbner's 'Cultivation hypothesis'. This conclusion supported my theory and proved helpful in chapters one and three of my PIP. However, the article was published in 1997, resulting in irrelevant or outdated information, for example, Eschholz investigated the impact of reading about crime in newspapers, which has become an increasingly uncommon way to indulge in media. Therefore, the validity of this source is suboptimal. On the other hand, since the journal article utilised, compiled and synthesised generations worth of research and data, her conclusions were extremely valid during its time of publication. Furthermore, bias remains unnoticeable throughout her writing as there is information provided to support either side of the argument, further increasing the reliability. Thus, the usefulness of the conclusions made in this source overshadows its validity or lack thereof.

Hanych M, Smekal H and Benák J, '***The Influence of Public Opinion and Media on Judicial Decision-Making: Elite Judges***' Perceptions and Strategies' (2023) 14 International Journal for Court Administration <https://iacajournal.org/articles/10.36745/ijca.528> accessed 15 June 2025

This journal article, 'The Influence of Public Opinion and Media on Judicial Decision-Making' Perceptions and Strategies' outlines the tedious balance for judges to make rulings that are legitimate in the eyes of the public, yet remain unaffected by extralegal influences. The authors are professors and assistant professors from various universities who all have numerous other articles relating to policing or the criminal justice system, improving the article's reliability. In summary, to successfully discuss this layered issue, judges were divided into 3 categories, those who remain isolated from public opinion, those who resist public pressure but reluctantly monitor media discussion and finally those who openly allow the public's discussion to influence their decisions. This allowed for a nuanced and unbiased approach to the numerous positions judges may take on this challenge growing in prevalence. However, the specific nature of this article meant it was only relevant to a very small portion of my overall PIP topic. Yet, the immense amount of secondary sources utilised to support their discussion proves this article is accurate. Similarly, the validity of this source is upheld, given that it was published only two years prior to the creation of my PIP. Finally, since this journal article was found in the International Journal for Court Administrations, a respected peer-reviewed source of information, it can be considered highly reliable. Holistically, this source did not prove particularly useful to the entirety of my PIP but was essential in guiding aspects of my synthesis.

Haslam RH & Illner A & Chuang S, '*Functional Brain Imaging: Evaluation of the Effects of Violent Media Exposure*' (2003) 8 Paediatrics & Child Health 283 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2792685/> accessed 23 March 2025

Haslam's journal article, 'Functional Brain Imaging: Evaluation of the Effects of Violent Media Exposure', summarised and collated recent findings in relation to the media's effect on young people's minds. This was an overview of new studies that are being carried out in relation to neurology and the consumption of violent content, which in the past, this type of research has been focused on video games, yet Haslam suggests brain alterations may occur from exposure to media. The article was heavily reliant on the Radiological Society of North America's preliminary findings, as their results have not been released, which impacts this source's reliability. However, its broad conclusions proved helpful in chapter one and were essential in linking youth crime to desensitisation within chapter three. Moreover, no bias is visible throughout this piece, and the argument is heavily based on secondary research despite not having any specific statistics, increasing the reliability of this journal article. Similarly, since this source is on an official website of the United States government, it can be considered reliable. Additionally, Haslam constructed this piece in 2003, making its contents predominantly valid, however further research was conducted to find quantitative evidence. This article was valuable not only throughout my PIP but to promote further thought into the aggressive implications of desensitisation which results from normalisation within the media.

Pantumsinchai P, '*Armchair Detectives and the Social Construction of Falsehoods: An Actor–Network Approach*' (2018) 21 Information, Communication & Society 761 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428654?needAccess=true> accessed 9 May 2025

This journal article titled 'Armchair Detectives and the Social Construction of Falsehoods: An Actor–Network Approach' discusses the complexity of truth in our technology-reliant world. Pantumsinchai explained that public discourse on cellular devices has had a growing role in causing fabricated assumptions to be perceived as reality. To display this, the author used two case studies, one on the Boston bombing (2013) and another on the Bangkok bombing (2015). In both instances, untrained individuals formed forums and groups online to

attempt to find the bomber themselves. However, in each case, this only resulted in the proliferation and creation of falsehoods, which the author refers to as "rumour-mongering". To break down the societal implications of this normalised behaviour, the article was framed through the lens of the Actor-Network Theory, which suggests that both human and non-human interactions (ie, technology) impact the construction of false truths. While this theory wasn't mentioned specifically in my PIP, I utilised this idea to shape the topic of my first chapter, and this article also provided the key term "key board sleuths", which was vital in the creation of chapter two. Moreover, the author, Professor Pantumsinchai, is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Hawai'i, increasing the reliability of her work. Additionally, it was published on Taylor and Francis, which is a high-quality and reputable source that provides peer-reviewed journal articles, further amplifying the reliability. On the other hand, this piece is moderately valid as it was written in 2017, meaning its contents may lack relevance, but since no further progress has been made on the cases discussed, the time of publication isn't as significant. Finally, the high accuracy of the journal article is evident in its extensive reference list, which is integrated within Pantumsinchai's writing. Ultimately, this journal article was only utilised in chapter two, and so was mildly beneficial.

Soothill K, '*Crime and the Media: A Vicious Circle?*' (1998) 70 AQ: Australian Quarterly 24 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20637721> accessed 23 March 2025

Soothill's academic article 'Crime and the Media: A Vicious Circle?' sheds light on the way in which media content has the power to influence society's perceptions, including reinforcing stereotypes associated with criminal activity. In particular, this source acknowledges the media's role in creating mass panics, fear, desensitisation and aggressive behaviour, supporting my arguments in both chapters one and three. This source came from the Australian Quarterly, which, despite not being academic, is considered reliable as it is the longest-running political science journal that focuses on societal impacts of the issues it addresses. Moreover, throughout this piece, it was heavily corroborated by a series of other secondary sources to support its claims, improving its reliability. Yet, it's important to note that it was written in 1998, so a large portion of the information may be outdated, causing me to verify the claims included in this PIP with external sources. Moreover, bias was evident throughout the piece, as the author was clearly opposed to the media seen in their extensive coverage of its negative impacts. However, when personal opinions were made, Soothill acknowledged this in his writing by clearly stating it was merely an assumption. The

information put forward in this journal article proved crucial in the formation of chapter three, where I correlate violent media consumption to fear and desensitisation. However, as the article progressed, it began to place a large emphasis on mass panic, which is only partially relevant to my PIP. Therefore, this source was mostly helpful and prompted further research into the ideas presented.

Vincent S, '***Media Constructions of Crime.***' The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 539 (1995) pp. 141–54. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1048402> accessed 8 November 2024

This journal article was somewhat useful as it provided some interesting perspectives and avenues that may be helpful to explore in chapter one of my PIP and supported my claims in my final chapter. It unpacked the under-researched issue of how the dramatisation of criminal activity within our news services may have influenced increased crime rates and the feeling of safety expressed by individuals in society. However, despite speaking in a different context about the separation between online and real-life events it encouraged me to consider how the media in which crime is displayed, creates distance between the victims and societal citizens. In turn, this produces a de-realisation, allowing individuals to justify unethical investigations, as explored in chapter two. Moreover, I was challenged to consider the impact on an individual personally affected by the event, as well as those living locally, on a meso level, compared to the rest of society, on a macro level. Sacco wrote this in 1995 which will affect its relevance in our society today and the reliability of his statements; however these insights are valuable to my cross-generational study (Generation X). Yet, this may affect the validity of this source, but it is still considered reliable as it is an academic article recorded on JSTOR.

News Articles

Ackland R, '***The Teacher's Pet Podcast Likely Turbocharged the Wheels of Justice, but Judges Don't Approve***' The Guardian (2 September 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/02/the-teachers-pet-podcast-likely-turbocharged-the-wheels-of-justice-but-judges-dont-approve> accessed 2 May 2025

Ackland's article discussed the role of the media in bringing cases into the public eye, but revealed that overwhelming coverage may sway the outcome of a judicial trial. In particular,

it referenced the murder of Lynette Dawson in 1982 and the conviction of Chris Dawson in 2022. Ackland writes how this legal ruling was "turbocharged" by The Teachers' Pet podcast, which assisted in reigniting public and police interest in the case. However, the ethical concern was raised that it may be impossible to obtain a fair ruling, as public opinion has been heavily shaped by the media and thus it became difficult to find an unbiased jury. This example was essential in chapter two, in order to establish the occasional positive effects of publicised cases, for it expedited the outcome. Furthermore, this piece is labelled as an opinion and so bias throughout the article is inevitable, but it was counteracted by providing many different perspectives. Since it is from a reputable source, The Guardian, and within Ackland's writing, it contains references and quotes from other content it is on the whole reliable. Moreover, being only three years old without any further progress in the case, this article also withholds its validity. Therefore, this article was essential in the development of my argument in chapter 3, which in turn reduces my personal bias through considering the opposing perspective.

Brennan D, '***Child Commissioner Says Media Coverage of Youth Crime Is Creating More Fear***'
(2024) National Indigenous Times
<https://nit.com.au/02-10-2024/14022/child-commissioner-says-media-coverage-of-youth-crime-is-creating-more-fear> accessed 16 January 2025

This news article, written by Brennan, outlines the way in which increased media coverage of youth crime is prompting paranoia and fear amongst the population. He reports on the headline nature of true crime and how the abuse of this profit-driven technique, without offering any solution, has instilled lasting fear in the public. However, Brennan labelled this as a political tool and, in turn, criticised the government's approach of using media to 'scare' kids out of committing crimes. These two insights proved helpful in chapters one and three of my PIP, where I unpack how the sensationalised content produced by the media fosters paranoia. Although this piece was written with a clear political agenda to promote change in the authorities' approach when it comes to reporting on crime, it thus exudes unhelpful personal bias. Moreover, despite The National Indigenous Times not being a well-known source, the extensive research within the article makes this source mostly reliable. On the other hand, Brennan constructed this text late in 2024 and thus remains valid, yet it failed to address the ethical implications of the government's actions, which meant some information remained irrelevant to my topic. This article prompted me to explore how the intentional

abuse of power within the media is used to instil fear and encouraged me to consider the links between the rise in true crime and youth crime, which was essential to chapter three.

Coggan M, '***Zodiac Killer Code Cracked by Australian Mathematician Sam Blake More than 50 Years after First Murder***' Australian Broadcasting Corporation (11 December 2020) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-12/zodiac-killer-code-cracked-by-australian-mathematician/12 977342> accessed 5 May 2025

Coggan's ABC article outlines the story of a mathematician in Melbourne who, during COVID, developed an interest in the Zodiac killer's case and, in turn, ended up solving one of the ciphers. Despite this puzzle remaining unsolved for 50 years, this case has never left the public's eye and so Sam Blake decided to utilise the University of Melbourne's supercomputer in order to reveal the encoded message. The results found that the Zodiac used a homophonic substitution and despite the note not directly providing any insights into the identity of the murderer, it is hoped that this will assist in solving the final two unscrambled letters through the use of the same methodology. This report was helpful in the creation of my argument in chapter two of my PIP where I used the Zodiac killers case as an example of armchair detectives involving themselves in an active, unsolved case. However, due to the specific nature of this source it is limited in its relevance throughout the rest of my writing. Moreover, since this is a report on an experience little bias is evident, yet, it is clearly sensationalised to evoke hope amongst the audience that this will allow for the possibility of identifying this criminal. ABC, as a news source can be considered reliable in the information it reports but exaggerations are common throughout this piece, meaning it is only moderately accurate. Furthermore, Coggan's work remains valid as it was only written five years ago and few advancements in the case have occurred since.

Farrell G & Davies T, '***Most Crime Has Fallen by 90% in 30 Years – so Why Does the Public Think It's Increased?***' The Conversation (13 May 2024) <https://theconversation.com/most-crime-has-fallen-by-90-in-30-years-so-why-does-the-public-think-its-increased-228797> accessed 29 April 2025

Farrell's article, 'Most Crime Has Fallen by 90% in 30 Years – so Why Does the Public Think It's Increased?' outlined the ever-decreasing global crime rates, yet the skewed public perception that this isn't the case. The source discussed the way in which violent crimes have,

in general, decreased, with exceptions to a few local areas. They attributed this to increased security and policing, making it 'harder' to commit a crime, meaning young people missed the opportunity to enact 'entry-level' misdemeanours. Farrell then analysed the power of the media and political leaders to change our views to believe that crime is actually increasing due to the regular headline reporting of violent criminal activity. This information is relevant to all three chapters of my PIP and, in particular, it has provided valuable statistics to use in chapter one. This is a reliable source as it is consistently backed up by evidence, and The Conversation regularly features academic writers. Moreover, it was only written in 2024, meaning the information remains both valid and accurate. Bias isn't seen throughout this piece, as it is a fact-based report about crime decreasing over time. Furthermore, it urged me to search for statistics that show an increase in media coverage since the beginning of Generation Z.

Horton A, '"The Uprisings Opened up the Door": The TV Cop Shows Confronting a Harmful Legacy' The Guardian (24 April 2021)
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/24/tv-police-cop-shows-hollywood-legacy>
accessed 24 October 2024

This article has been vital in directing my PIP as it made me consider the ethical implications of crimes portrayed in the media, particularly modern television shows. This theme has guided chapter two, in which I explore the unethical nature of crime in the media. For example, Adrian Horton speaks of how minority groups have been used in an episode of 'The Rookie' to emphasise the 'tough-guy' stereotype for law enforcement officers. Furthermore, these shows consult real police who recount their heroic and valourising stories. Horton accuses that this oversaturation of courageous police officers in the media has impacted normalising the injustice found all through legal and policing systems, utilised in my synthesis in chapter one. However, this article didn't acknowledge any bias and didn't discuss the possible positives such as respect for cops and more knowledge of the legal system, which reduces its reliability and further research was made into the beneficial implications. Moreover, this source may not be completely valid as it is more than three years old and so information may be outdated. On the other hand, The Guardian is recognised as a relatively reliable resource but bias is usually prevalent. This article has been useful as it challenged me to consider the possible impacts of the upsurging of police shows and this theme of oversaturation is a major focus in my PIP.

Lett P, '*Opinion | Is Our True-Crime Obsession Doing More Harm than Good?*' The New York Times (28 October 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/opinion/true-crime-petito.html#> accessed 16 October 2024

Lett's article 'Opinion | Is Our True-Crime Obsession Doing More Harm than Good?' has been very useful to the creation of my PIP. This source illuminated the possible harmful and helpful effects true crime can have on individual behaviour, reducing the bias of the writer. This relates to the theme of how consumption may affect identity, in particular the social self which is the central sociological theory sustained throughout my PIP. The author spoke about the implications of the over-representation of crime in today's media and how this has led to the rise of 'armchair detectives' and 'vigilantism' which are both vital key terms for chapter two of my PIP. The point was then raised that the possible effects of over-exposure such as paranoia and subconsciously reinforcing institutionalised discrimination became the basis for chapter three. However, although each argument was backed up with evidence it inevitably includes some bias as the article was clearly labelled as an 'opinion'. Yet, the author concluded that true crime has done more bad than good and then spent more time unpacking the former impacting reliability of their argument. Yet, this source can be considered as a valid opinion due to the mostly reliable nature of the New York Times and the clear supporting evidence outlined in the article.

Reports

Roberts S, '*Why Do We Love True Crime? The Phenomenon behind Our Obsession*' Criminal Law Practitioner (26 April 2023) <https://www.crimlawpractitioner.org/post/why-do-we-love-true-crime-the-phenomenon-behind-our-obsession> accessed 23 October 2024

This source titled 'Why do we love true crime? The Phenomenon Behind Our Obsession' written by Siena Roberts, was helpful for my PIP as it assisted my exploration of the relevant topic of true crime. It discussed the staggering statistics that reveal the rise of true crime obsession in America while also focusing on the reasons for the rise, which Roberts attributes to its appeal to younger generations, and thus, these statistics assisted me throughout my PIP in reference to my cross-cultural study (Gen Z). It provided an interesting narrative that mentioned both the positives and negatives, reducing any personal bias in this source.

Roberts then discussed the possible negative phenomenon of the human desire to experience danger without being in any, whilst also the benefit that it helps young women to feel safer in society as they have better knowledge of the legal system and greater trust in the police. This has provided vital insights into the key term, 'armchair detective', which is the central focus of chapter two in my PIP as it referred to the appeal of the puzzle/mystery-solving aspect of true crime. Moreover, Roberts' writing was significantly backed up by a lot of statistical data increasing the validity of the report and encouraging me to analyse further statistical and quantitative data from my questionnaire to include in my responses. Furthermore, this perspective comes from the Washington College of Law and references many other universities and professionals from different fields who have researched similar areas making this article reliable.

Shults JF, '**The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association**', National Police Association (25 October 2022) <https://nationalpolice.org/the-publics-fascination-with-homicide/> accessed 15 June 2025

This report titled 'The Public's Fascination with Homicide, National Police Association' written by former Police Chief Shults, provided valuable insights into each of my chapters. It began by discussing the rise of true crime shows and their growing amount of macabre and graphic imagery over time. These evidence-based statements proved important to chapters one and two of my PIP. The author then continued to outline society's evolving expectations of the efficacy of legal processes and investigations, relevant to a specific section in the first chapter. Ultimately, the article lists possible implications of our culture becoming more obsessed with murder, one of which was the devaluing of life. This proved valuable to my discussion of desensitisation in the final chapter of my major work. Yet, since the author was involved in the police force that he is discussing, bias would be prevalent in his writing, but is reduced through presenting both sides of the argument. On the other hand, Shults's position as an ex-police chief offers increased reliability to this source due to his ability to use first-hand information. However, the accuracy of this article remains low as minimal references to other works are made and some conclusions are assumption-based. Moreover, it was written in 2022, which means the knowledge documented is mostly still valid, but given the ever-changing field of true crime, more recent sources were used to confirm its findings. On the whole, this source supported my original hypothesis, making it essential in bolstering the evidence in my chapters.

Website

Justice For Erik & Lyle, '*Justice for Erik & Lyle*' Justice For Erik & Lyle (2024)
<https://www.justiceforerikandlyle.org/> accessed 28 May 2025

The existence of this webpage is a manifestation of the global movement for justice to remain as the central purpose of all legal rulings rather than punitive intent. This, in particular, has led to an uprising of people contesting the legitimacy of Lyle and Erik Menendez's charges of first-degree murder and conspiracy. In light of new evidence, which is a letter Erik previously sent outlining his father's sexual abuse, this site protests for a re-trial for these convicted felons. To do so, they have set up national and international petitions, receiving signatures from across the globe. They have extended this to encompass a larger societal issue towards the stigma of young boys being sexually abused. Thus, this page is intended for those who have been troubled by the results of this case in light of the larger issue of child abuse, yet the bright and modern layout provides an enticing appeal to younger generations. The creators of this website have provided compelling arguments for the men's charges to be dropped as imperfect self-defence, making their bias clear that they believe they should be freed. However, despite the lack of a counterargument, this petition has been paid for by Justice for Victims of Sexual Abuse, increasing the reliability to a small extent. Its accuracy, on the other hand, is undeniable by the thorough use of facts, statistics, quotes and testimonies from sexual abuse survivors to support its argument. Moreover, despite the slight decrease in attention, this case still remains in the public eye, allowing the authors to provide an updated news section on their page. This ultimately ensures that any new advancements, changes or new rulings will be included, increasing the validity and relevancy of this source. Overall, this insight into the modern movement pushing for justice was essential in chapter two as I investigated the role of armchair detectives. Thus, although it contained bias and lacked relevance to the rest of my PIP, it was still vital in my research process.

Youth Endowment Fund, '*70% of Teens See Real-Life Violence on Social Media, Reveals New Research*', Youth Endowment Fund (25 November 2024)
<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/70-of-teens-see-real-life-violence-on-social-media-reveals -new-research/> accessed 5 June 2025

This in-depth website supplied me with various statistics and data to help the progression of my research and PIP. It was produced by the Youth Endowment Fund, whose evidence-based

work aims to prevent violence amongst youth and in this source, they provide suggestions on where they believe the growing aggression stems from to push for effective interventions. The report discusses the impact of Generation Z seeing weapons and violence online and its correlation to the rising level of real-life youth crime. To do so, they employed the primary research method of a questionnaire, given to 100,000 individuals aged 13-17 in England and Wales, to determine their personal experiences with violence online and offline. Its findings were significantly helpful throughout chapter three of my PIP, namely that "64% said that social media played a role, …[in orchestrating] in-person violence". In response to this finding and other concerning conclusions, the organisation is suggesting that youth limit their use of social media and activity to avoid the undeniable but largely unknown impacts on their brains and development. This relates to the concepts of 'power', particularly of the media, as well as the dangers of 'conformity' discussed throughout each of my chapters, thus, this website is significantly relevant to my PIP. However, this source expresses some bias as they attempt to persuade Generation Z to refrain from allowing social media to define their teen years, which may have impacted how they interpreted the results of their questionnaire or in the way they wrote the questions. Yet, the reliability of the organisation extends to this source, mitigating the risk that the bias has corrupted the legitimacy of this article. Similarly, since this was published only a year ago in 2024, the findings remain socially and culturally relevant and thus valid. In summary, this webpage was applicable to chapter three and its data supported my argument, proving to be essential in the development of my PIP.