

How does the glorification of crime in the media influence adolescents' attitudes towards criminality?



1

¹ S.Dinneen. (2019). *Real-life wolf of wall street Jordan Belfort reveals why the UK will survive Brexit*. Retrieved July 21, 2026a, from <<https://www.cityam.com/real-life-wolf-of-wall-street-jordan-belfort-talks-about-glamourising-fraud-and-surviving-brexite/>>

Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 3
Log	Page 5
Chapter 1 - Fascination or Desensitisation?	Page 7
Chapter 2 - Fear or Offend?	Page 11
Chapter 3 - Perception vs Reality	Page 17
Conclusion	Page 21
Resource List	Page 23

Introduction

The media plays a significant role in influencing individuals' attitudes towards criminality, because, "The content that we are most exposed to shapes our view about the world around us."². In modern society technology is becoming more and more integrated into everyday lives, whereby individual beliefs and values are heavily influenced by the content presented in the media. The easy access to technology gives individuals in society instant access to crime portals in the media. Crime has become more prevalent in popular culture, and its media representation has evolved over time. This has resulted in increased challenges for younger generations, including desensitisation and heightened intrigue towards crime, due to their increased exposure to criminal activity.

This Personal Interest Project investigates how the glorification of crime in the media influences adolescents' attitudes towards criminality. The central hypothesis posits that although media portrayals of crime can impact adolescents' views and understandings of criminal behaviour, these effects are moderated by social and cultural elements such as generational differences, geographical context, individual experiences and media consumption habits.

I have maintained a longstanding interest in crime and its portrayal in the media. Growing up, I was frequently exposed to crime films as well as documentaries, due to my father's significant interest in the subject. His involvement with crime media stimulated my curiosity and maintained my interest, resulting in discussions and critical analysis of crime and its representation in the media.

This investigation seeks to enhance knowledge of the impact of crime portrayed in the media. This topic of glorification of crime in the media, contributes to a better understanding of Society and Culture by investigating the role of media as a socialising agent in shaping adolescents perceptions of criminality within a progressively digital environment. Increased knowledge may inspire individuals, especially young individuals, to engage with the media

² R. Alitavoli and E. Kaveh, 'The U.S. Media's Effect on Public's Crime Expectations: A Cycle of Cultivation and Agenda-Setting Theory', *Societies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2018, Art. 58,

more critically rather than passively accepting glamorised or sympathetic representations of criminal activity. As a result, this investigation seeks to promote a better analytical comprehension of how media portrayals of crime can influence adolescents' views on criminal behaviour and their awareness of its repercussions.

Throughout this PIP, I will be incorporating a continuity and change analysis comparing Generation X and Generation Z to determine which generation has been impacted the most with crime in the media, and to investigate the change in people's perceptions on crime, in addition to the elements that persist over time. I will examine a cross-cultural aspect by analysing how individuals' locations affect their perceptions of crime, specifically whether residents in high-crime areas cultivate more negative views due to heightened exposure. This research is conducted through a questionnaire collecting qualitative and quantitative data from individuals from the Northern Beaches LGA and Penrith LGA in New South Wales.

Throughout my research I collected qualitative and quantitative data from various primary and secondary sources. The content analysis was crucial to my PIP since it provided a methodical evaluation of how various media texts construct and depict crime, rather than depending on assumption or subjective judgement. Through assessing factors such as language, visual techniques, emotional framing, and audience positioning across texts like *Criminal Minds*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, and *Goodfellas*, clear similarities were identified in how crime is glorified, justified, or punished. This provided useful qualitative data that validated the core premise of this PIP, about the media's influence on adolescent views of crime. Secondary sources, such as journal articles and sociological concepts, offered academic support and invaluable context for the research outcomes.

Log

My fascination with crime and its representation in the media originated in my youth when I viewed crime films, documentaries, and news articles alongside my dad. These encounters ignited my interest in understanding the allure of crime for audiences and its portrayal in many media formats. However, it was only when a Year 12 Society and Culture student delivered her PIP investigating crime to my Year 11 class, that I started to contemplate the subject from a sociological viewpoint and from that day I knew that I wanted to investigate the effects of crime in the media. Therefore, motivating me to explore not the crime itself, but the glorification of crime in the media and its influence on adolescents' attitudes towards criminality.

As my preliminary research developed, I discovered opposing viewpoints on crime in the media, with some research claiming it promotes fascination and desensitisation, whereas others contend it increases anxiety and alters perceptions of criminality. Consequently, I structured my chapters around these key ideas, 'Fascination or Desensitisation?', 'Fear or Offend?', and 'Perception vs Reality'. Together these chapters showcase a broad understanding of the varying effects of crime in the media.

My first primary research method was a questionnaire, which produced useful quantitative and qualitative data, revealing patterns in adolescents media use, perceptions on crime, and attitudes towards criminality. It additionally allowed for comparisons amongst participants from the Northern Beaches LGA and Penrith LGA. Sequentially, I conducted my content analysis on crime related television. This process was very time consuming and repetitive as I chose to analyse five films/shows to ensure my accuracy. Yet, it provided me with extensive understanding of identifying recurring trends, such as, glamourising criminals, sensationalised reporting and normalising criminal activity. Extensive secondary research, such as, journals, articles, reports and websites provided usefulness when comparing my primary findings with sociological theories, including, Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, thereby enhancing the validity of my findings.

Throughout the research process, one of the most difficult aspects was finding relevant academic studies specifically relating to adolescents, while there was thorough research of the representation and glorification of crime in the media, there were fewer studies which focussed specifically on adolescents attitudes towards criminality due to the glorification of crime in the media. This required me to critically examine a variety of sources and analyse multiple perspectives to improve the accuracy of my findings. Furthermore, my questionnaire consisted of 23 participants, the majority of whom were adolescents living in the Northern Beaches, reducing the geographical diversity of my research and the amount to which my results could be generalised.

Overall, my PIP journey has allowed me to deepen my understanding of crime in the media and has challenged my own perceptions of crime media. I now can understand how regular exposure to crime media can influence adolescents' views, behaviours and perceptions of criminal activity. Moreover, this investigation has improved my social and cultural literacy by expanding my awareness of the media's significant influence in generating social realities and shaping modern youth culture.

Fascination or Desensitisation?

Chapter 1: The influence of crime in pop culture + news media leading to desensitisation or fascination.

Crime in popular culture and news media play a crucial role in influencing individuals' perceptions of criminal activity, fostering both desensitisation and fascination. Crime in popular culture is typically portrayed as sensualised, dramatised, often violent, consistently switching the emphasis from realism to entertainment or myth-making. It can be portrayed from a perspective that highlights sensational violence, "moral panics," or the idealisation of offenders.

Desensitisation is defined as "to violence represents a form of habituation, a well-established type of non-associative learning that results in diminished response to a stimulus after repeated exposure".³ Fascination is defined as "in crime is due to people being drawn to these sensational stories by curiosity about the motivations of the criminals, concerns about justice and the legal system and the thrill of solving a real-life mystery."⁴

This chapter will explore what influence crime in the media has on an individual and whether that impact has led to desensitisation with crime or fascination with crime. These concepts will be employed as an analytical framework to determine if crime in the media fosters emotional numbness to violence habituation or an increased interest through curiosity, moral enquiries, and the involvement with contemporary storylines. While the fascination with criminal activity indicates continuity across generations, the processes in which people interact with and perceive crime media have altered over time. In modern digital contexts, heightened engagement with sensationalised criminal content leads to differing degrees of desensitisation or increased fear. Influenced by generational media consumption practices and cultural context.

³ S. Mrug, A. Madan, & M. Windle (2016). Emotional desensitization to violence contributes to adolescents' violent behavior. *Journal of abnormal child psychology*. U.S. National Library of Medicine. Accessed April 28, 2026, from <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4539292/>>

⁴ (N.d.). *Why are we fascinated by true crime?* | UNC-chapel hill. Retrieved April 27, 2026a <<https://www.unc.edu/posts/2024/01/11/why-are-we-fascinated-by-true-crime/>>

Research findings from my content analysis examine Albert Bandura's 'Social Learning theory' demonstrating how the media displays criminals in manners that may elicit the audience's fascination, recognition and approval in criminal activity. Bandura's hypothesis argues that individuals are more likely to imitate illicit behaviours that suggest rewards. This is reflected in 'The Wolf on Wall Street' which strongly glorifies crime in early stages of the film by emphasising wealth, power and prestige. Jordan Belfort is portrayed as a charismatic, confident, and wealthy stockbroker who leads an expensive lifestyle (yachts, mansions, parties). He is portrayed as an anti-hero, rather than a traditional villain.⁵ This can lead to adolescents appreciating Belfort's achievements while ignoring the illegality of his behaviours, equating and justifying the crime with his success. The film encourages sympathy by utilising humour to link the audience with Belfort, making his journey throughout the film feel personal and amusing. This encourages alignment and compassion rather than full justification. Viewers may feel intrigued and connected to Belfort, enhancing their tolerance for unethical activity.⁶ This can lead to adolescents appreciating Belfort's achievements while ignoring the illegality of his behaviours, equating and justifying the crime with his success. The film encourages sympathy by utilising humour to link the audience with Belfort, making his journey throughout the film feel personal and amusing. This encourages alignment and compassion rather than full justification. Viewers may feel intrigued and connected to Belfort, enhancing their tolerance for unethical activity.⁷

Crime in pop culture and the news media dramatically impacts public perception, frequently heightening fear and misrepresenting the truth by the emphasis on violent, sensationalised, or unusual crimes rather than statistical realities. This selective reporting can generate a misleading opinion on how widespread or severe crime is, causing people to overestimate their chances of becoming victims in their daily lives. As a result, audiences may experience increased stress, mistrust of their local communities, and inaccurate beliefs about specific

⁵ Primary research: Film content analysis of the portrayals of crime in the media - Wolf on Wall Street (2013) (22nd April 2026)

⁶ Primary research: Film and television content analysis of the portrayals of crime in the media (22nd April 2026) - Wolf on Wall Street (2013)

⁷Primary research: Film and television content analysis of the portrayals of crime in the media (22nd April 2026) - Wolf on Wall Street (2013)

social groups or locations.⁸ With time, these portrayals can reinforce fear-based thinking and promote stereotypes, eventually changing public opinion and influencing how society responds to crime and safety issues.

The exposure to violent media on a regular basis might desensitise people to violence and promote aggressive ideas and behaviours, indicating that media has a big influence on how people view violence. Regular exposure to violent media causes desensitisation, resulting in people to be less sensitive to violence on an emotional level.⁹ This desensitisation is associated with more aggressive ideas and actions, demonstrating how media exposure can affect how teenagers view and react to violence. Individuals can become less emotionally affected by violence through the overconsumption of violence in the media.¹⁰ Repeated exposure to violence in the media demonstrates how desensitised people could have less compassion for victims. This may make people more likely to tolerate or accept violence. Leading violence to be more acceptable in the world. Emphasising that desensitisation to real-life and movie violence diminishes physiological responses, resulting in fewer reactions to violent images.

Fascination and desensitisation, while typically viewed as opposing reactions to crime in the media, at times coexist, influencing adolescents' perceptions of criminality in intricate manners. Recurring exposure may diminish emotional responsiveness to violence while concurrently heightening intrigue towards perpetrators and criminal activities.¹¹ This illustrates that adolescents could grow more accepting of violent or immoral conduct while still being enthralled by the narratives, characters, and ways of life linked to perpetrators. Instead of promoting the acceptance of criminal behaviour, media portrayal may render violence commonplace while also stimulating interest in the motives and experiences of

⁸ R. Alitavoli, & E. Kaveh (2018). The U.S. media's effect on public's crime expectations: A cycle of cultivation and agenda-setting theory. MDPI. Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute. Retrieved May 2, 2026,

⁹ B., Möller, I., Huesmann, L. R., Kirwil, L., Felber, J., & Berger, A. (2011). Desensitisation to media violence: Links with habitual media violence exposure, aggressive cognitions, and aggressive behavior. *Journal of personality and social psychology*. U.S. National Library of Medicine

¹⁰ Krahé B and others, "Desensitization to Media Violence: Links with Habitual Media Violence Exposure, Aggressive Cognitions, and Aggressive Behavior." (2011) 100 *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 630

¹¹ Maria Elizabeth Grabe and Dan G. Drew, 'Crime Cultivation: Comparisons Across Media Genres and Channels', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2007, pp. 147–171.

offenders.¹² This is reflected in the 'Wolf of Wall Street' where Jordan Belfort's deceitful behaviour is depicted in conjunction with affluence, prestige, and charm. Despite the condemnation of his illicit behaviour, the film's comedic tone and opulent lifestyle captivate viewers, fostering emotional engagement with his character. As a result, audiences can develop diminished emotional impact regarding the immoral aspects of his offences, while cultivating fascination for achieving success and status linked to his way of life.¹³



¹⁴Figure 1. The researcher's conceptual framework depicts the iterative connection between fascination and desensitisation, informed by Brockmyer (2013) and Fanti et al. (2009).

Consequently, the media's exaltation of criminal behaviour does not merely desensitise or captivate adolescents in solitude. Instead, these reactions can coexist, collectively influencing perceptions of criminality in intricate and diverse manners.

¹² Bandura, A., 'Social Learning Theory', Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1977.

¹³ Primary research: Film content analysis of the portrayals of crime in the media - Wolf on Wall Street (2013) (22nd April 2026)

¹⁴ Figure 1. Adapted from Jeanne Funk Brockmyer, 'Media Violence, Desensitization, and Psychological Engagement', in Karen E. Dill (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Media Psychology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013),

Fear or Offend?

Chapter 2: scared of crime or more inclined to partake in crime.

The impact of crime in the media prompts critical queries over whether frequent exposure of crime leads to increased fear of crime, or alternatively, fosters the normalisation and possible replication of criminal behaviour among adolescents. This chapter analyses location as a cross-cultural effect by contrasting the perceptions of crime among individuals living in the Northern Beaches LGA and Penrith LGA in New South Wales. Investigating whether varying community surroundings and criminal activity rates influence adolescents' perspectives on criminal activity. This chapter also examines the effects of glorification of crime in the media, and whether it leads adolescents to be scared or more inclined to partake in criminal actions. It will examine how media consumption, age disparities, and cultural context affect adolescents' fear of crime or their inclination towards criminality.

Criminal intersection with legal and safety systems is complex. As such, several fundamental concepts will be specified to build the basis for assessing the impact of media on adolescents' fear of crime or their propensity to criminal activity. 'Fear of crime' relates to an individual's anxiety over possibly becoming a victim in criminal activity. It has been described as "A phenomenon that has gathered attention from criminologists and policymakers since the mid-1960s."¹⁵ 'The inclination to partake in crime' is the motives and initial thoughts of participating in criminal acts. "A criminal act occurs when there is a motive, a means, and an opportunity. Criminal behaviors that lead offenders to recidivate are often called "risk factors"¹⁶ Crime can either be premeditated ("A crime committed with deliberate consideration and planning".)¹⁷ Compared to unpremeditated crime which is a spontaneous

¹⁵ EBSCO, 'Fear of crime: Social Sciences and Humanities: Research starters', EBSCO Research Starters, n.d., <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/social-sciences-and-humanities/fear-crime>, accessed 27 May 2026.

¹⁶ Police1 Staff, '6 traits that lead to criminal behavior', Police1, n.d., <https://www.police1.com/corrections/articles/6-traits-that-lead-to-criminal-behavior-QKg2lpUaZbdKL1ot/>, accessed 27 May 2026.

¹⁷ Legal Literate "Premeditated Crime | Legal Literate" (2024) <https://www.legalliterate.org.au/legal-term/premeditated-crime/> accessed 27 July 2026.

crime, an offence committed in the “heat of the moment”. It is initiated by an abrupt, profound emotion (such as extreme rage or astonishment) rather than premeditated intention.

Albert Bandura’s Social learning theory “posits that people acquire new behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions by observing and imitating others within a social context.”¹⁸ The theory focuses on how cognitive factors influence learning. This theory is significantly relevant to adolescents as during this developmental phase, identity formation, peer influence, and media intake profoundly impact attitudes and behaviours. The repeated exposure to glamorised depictions of crime in films, music, social media, and television could result in adolescents viewing criminal activity as normal, fulfilling, or acceptable in social settings.¹⁹ Albert Bandura examines how adolescents are more likely to act out criminal activity that gives a reward rather than a punishment. This is significant, because rewards are powerful drivers of human action. The explosion of criminal shows, online content and digital content in Westernised contemporary societies (e.g. Fortnite/Call of Duty/ Assassin's Creed) reflects the hungry adolescent audience that longs to glory in criminal acts, without the legal ramifications of committing these acts in real life.²⁰

The findings from my questionnaire align with Bandura’s theory. Out of the 23 respondents surveyed, 12 participants either agreed or firmly agreed that crime media glorifies criminal behaviour, whilst 18 participants perceived that crime media renders criminal activity as being considered “normal” or “everyday”. Furthermore, 13 participants indicated experiencing a degree of desensitisation to violence due to regular exposure to crime in the media. By contrast, other researchers argue while there is certainly heightened exposure, the degree of increased aggression and violent acts committed by adolescents is that the correlation between exposure to violent video games and real-world adolescent aggressiveness is not strongly sustained.²¹ The results of the study indicate that persistent exposure to criminal material can shape adolescents' conceptions of criminality, reinforcing

¹⁸ S. McLeod, ‘Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory’, Simply Psychology, n.d., <https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html>, accessed 27 May 2026.

¹⁹ Primary research: Film content analysis of the portrayals of crime in the media

²⁰ Ebru Akbaş and Eda Kılınç İşleyen, ‘The Effect of Digital Game Addiction on Aggression and Anger Levels in Adolescents: A Cross-Sectional Study’ (2024) 52 Archives of Psychiatric Nursing 106–112, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2024.06.022>, accessed 27 May 2026.

²¹ Przybylski, A.K. & Weinstein, N., ‘Violent video game engagement is not associated with adolescents’ aggressive behaviour: evidence from a registered report’ (2019) *Royal Society Open Science* 6(2):171474, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.171474>, accessed 27 May 2026.

Bandura's theory that attitudes and behaviours can be acquired through modeling and imitating others. Nevertheless, the findings reveal that concern persists as a notable consequence, with 15 participants claiming that crime in the media induces feelings of fear or apprehension regarding crime in society. This indicates that media exposure can simultaneously mainstream criminal activity while heightening fears of victimisation.²²

The media creates an aspect of fear through the overreporting and poor representation of crime in the media resulting in crime being more common than it truly is. According to Brown "an association between exposure to violence in entertainment and violent behaviour, but do not prove that exposure causes violent behaviour. Rather, there is a risk that exposure to media violence will increase the likelihood of subsequent aggressive behaviour".²³ Emphasising that media influence may lead to alterations in perception and potential escalations in aggressive reactions among individuals.

While the social learning theory examines how individuals develop new perspectives through the use of crime media. Whereas, George Gerbner's Cultivation theory, "a sociological concept that posits that our perceptions of social reality are significantly shaped by the messages and depictions we encounter on television".²⁴ According to the hypothesis, the more time people devote to viewing online media, the more prone they are to accept its portrayals as accurate representations of life.²⁵ Dolliver et al examines the connection between the consumption of media, fear of crime, and the approval for criminal justice reforms were investigated through the Cultivation theory to determine how crime in the media influences individuals opinions. The study shows that exposure in the media not only directly instills fear, but also indirectly impacts public opinion by encouraging approval for harsher criminal justice measures. The findings indicate that the fear of crime has a significant relationship between media intake and inaccurate perceptions of safety and danger. The primary research revealed that questionnaire responses indicated a significant number of

²² Questionnaire

²³ Brown M 1996. The portrayal of violence in the media: impacts and implications for policy. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice no. 55. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

²⁴ Cultivation theory: Communication and mass media: Research starters: EBSCO research. (n.d.). EBSCO. Retrieved June 1, 2026

²⁵ (N.d.). (PDF) examining the relationship between media consumption, fear of crime, and support for controversial criminal justice policies using a nationally representative sample. Retrieved May 4, 2026a, Accessed 4.5.26

respondents perceived crime to be more relevant in society than official crime statistics suggest, illustrating how continuous media consumption may influence views of social reality.

The perception of crime varies depending on age and maturity (approximately ages 10–22 years)²⁶ Therefore adolescents at various phases of development may understand crime media in different ways. Adolescents have “heightened emotional sensitivity and protracted development of reflective processing and cognitive control” making them “specifically reactive to emotion-arousing media.”²⁷ As a result, the impact of media on perceptions of criminality varies, with some adolescents growing to be more scared of crime while others become desensitised to it.

With certain adolescents “exposure to media violence leads to aggressive thoughts, emotions, and behavior, and also to fear and desensitization.”²⁸ Some adolescents are “more vulnerable to violent media messages and imagery”²⁹ demonstrating the effects of violence in the media and how they are influenced by its characteristics and context. The impact of social media on the mental health of adolescents is determined by numerous variables, including the duration of time adolescents engage with platforms online, the nature of the content they encounter, the interactions facilitated by social media, and the extent to which it interferes with adolescents' wellbeing.³⁰ “Brain development is a critical factor to consider when assessing the risk for harm. Adolescents, ages 10 to 19, are undergoing a highly sensitive period of brain development.”³¹ demonstrating how adolescents are at a higher risk when viewing crime in the media, since their brains are still in the development phase. “This is a period when risk-taking behaviors reach their peak.”³² Geographic location appeared as a significant element shaping adolescents' views of crime. With the comparison of respondents from my

²⁶ Eveline A. Crone and Elly A. Konijn, ‘Media Use and Brain Development During Adolescence’, *Nature Communications*, vol. 9, no. 588, 2018, p. 1.

²⁷ Eveline A. Crone and Elly A. Konijn, ‘Media Use and Brain Development During Adolescence’, *Nature Communications*, vol. 9, no. 588, 2018, p. 1.

²⁸ Marjorie J. Hogan, ‘Adolescents and Media Violence: Six Crucial Issues for Practitioners’, *Adolescent Medicine Clinics*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2005, p. 250.

²⁹ Marjorie J. Hogan, ‘Adolescents and Media Violence: Six Crucial Issues for Practitioners’, *Adolescent Medicine Clinics*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2005, p. 250.

³⁰ Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). (1970). Social media has both positive and negative impacts on children and adolescents. Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory [Internet]. U.S. National Library of Medicine. Retrieved June 5, 2026

³¹ Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). (1970). Social media has both positive and negative impacts on children and adolescents. Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory [Internet]. U.S. National Library of Medicine. Retrieved June 5, 2026

³² Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). (1970). Social media has both positive and negative impacts on children and adolescents. Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory [Internet]. U.S. National Library of Medicine. Retrieved June 5, 2026

questionnaire, Northern Beaches LGA and Penrith LGA disparities were recognised in adolescents' perceptions of the prevalence and consequences of crime. "Neighborhood research indicates that adolescents are at higher risk for delinquency when they reside in neighborhoods low in collective efficacy, low in perceived prosocial norms and values, and high in availability of substances and firearms."³³ Demonstrating how location plays a significant role on individuals' perception of crime, leading to higher risk and lower risk depending on the location. This was evident in my questionnaire, that respondents from the Northern Beaches LGA were significantly more inclined to perceive that crime is represented as more prevalent in the media than it truly is.

Among the 70% of respondents representing the Northern Beaches LGA, 39% stated that crime is depicted as more prevalent in the media compared to how it actually is, while just 9% opposed. This reinforces the association between the representation of crime in the media and the public's perception of criminality. Indicating that regular engagement with dramatised or sensationalised criminal material can lead to skewed views of crime incidence amongst adolescents.³⁴ On the contrary, respondents from the Penrith LGA were more inclined to view media portrayals of crime as accurate reflections of daily life.³⁵ Among the 26% of respondents from Penrith, 13% responded that crime does not appear as frequent as it genuinely is, while just 9% of respondents agreed that it was exaggerated. Despite being less in percentage in comparison to the Northern Beaches LGA respondents, the data holds significance as it illustrates a divergence in the perceptions of crime among adolescents from various geographic areas. Aligning with findings from the 'safest and most dangerous suburbs in Sydney' states that "Penrith recorded 1,972 offences, including 531 malicious mischief" the urbanised region also documented "380 non-domestic violence assaults, 286 domestic violence assaults, 146 burglaries, and 189 break-and-enter offences."³⁶ highlighting how Penrith has higher criminal rates compared to the Northern Beaches. This finding highlights that individuals in geographic areas with a perceived lower crime rate critique

³³ Tompsett, C.J., Amrhein, K.E. & Hassan, S., 'Travel Beyond the Home Neighborhood for Delinquent Behaviors: Moderation of Home Neighborhood Influences', *Journal of Adolescence*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2014, pp. 325–333, accessed 27 May 2026.

³⁴ Primary research: Personal reflection

³⁵ Primary research: Questionnaire

³⁶ Shelly, "Uhomes.Com Blogs: Student Guides on Living, Travel, Lifestyle" (2024) <<https://en.uhomes.com/blog/safest-and-most-dangerous-suburbs-in-sydney>> accessed July 29, 2026

sensationalised media representations, considering them exaggerated for entertainment or news purposes. On the other hand, adolescents who live in areas where crime is perceived as a larger social problem may be more likely to accept media representations as a true reflection of reality. Suggesting that location has a critical role in not just shaping adolescents' exposure to crime, but additionally in their understanding of media content and the formation of attitudes on criminality. This supports my content analysis findings which demonstrated that media portrayals of crime frequently vary according to the narrative context and environment of the media. This is evident in 'Criminal Minds' portrays crime as reckless and deviant through fear-driven narratives, while films such as 'The Wolf of Wall Street' and Goodfellas initially romanticise criminal settings. This is executed by linking characters to financial status, prestige, and exhilaration, subsequently disclosing its repercussions.³⁷ Therefore demonstrating how the glorification of crime in the media affects adolescents variably based on their geographical context and personal experiences.

Ultimately, the evidence compiled in this chapter indicates that while media portrayals of crime can normalise criminal behaviour by influencing adolescents' views and opinions, individuals are more inclined to foster fear and apprehension regarding criminal activity rather than to promote engagement with criminal activities. The findings demonstrate that while adolescents are exposed to crime in the media, they face both fear and desensitisation, revealing the complexity and diverse nature of media influence. The questionnaire results stated that 65% of the participants were afraid or apprehensive towards crime, in contrast to 56% which expressed some level of desensitisation. Therefore concluding that adolescents are more prone to developing fear and concern towards crime, rather than cultivate an authentic propensity for engaging in illicit behaviour. Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that media consumption can shape perspectives on criminality, whereas the questionnaire data and Cultivation Theory indicate that crime in the media consistently amplifies attitudes regarding threat and victimisation. Consequently, crime in the media is more influential at instilling the fear of crime as opposed to motivating adolescents to engage in criminal activity.³⁸

³⁷ Film content analysis of the portrayals of crime in the media - Criminal Minds, Wolf on Wall Street, and Goodfellas

³⁸ (N.d.). (PDF) examining the relationship between media consumption, fear of crime, and support for controversial criminal justice policies using a nationally representative sample. Retrieved May 4, 2026a, Accessed 4.5.26

Perception vs Reality

Chapter 3: The role of crime prevalence in impacting perceptions of deviant behaviours.

The perceptions of crime in the media can significantly impact adolescents' opinions of the prevalence of criminal behaviours in society. Crime prevalence refers to the proportion of people (or targets, e.g. households, properties or cars) in an area who are victimised.³⁹ According to the Cultivation Theory, the media shapes people's reality and their views on the world around them.⁴⁰ The content that we are most exposed to shapes our view about the world around us.⁴¹ The theory posits that individuals with an extensive media consumption are more inclined to absorb content through broadcasts shown on television.⁴² This can result in individuals adjusting their perspectives and opinions regarding surrounding issues in response to these persistent messages. As a result, adolescents may form misconceptions about the prevalence, severity, and regularity of criminal activity in society. This chapter will investigate the glorification of crime in the media and the influence of media portrayals on perceptions and analyses the impact of polarisation on contrasting views of crime among adolescents. It will also include a cross-cultural comparison of the Northern Beaches LGA and Penrith LGA, as well as a continuity and change analysis of Generations X and Z, to investigate how perceptions of crime differ by region and across time. Furthermore, it will include a polarisation analysis, which will investigate how adolescents form opposing opinions of crime prevalence based on their personal experiences, social circumstances, and beliefs.

³⁹ Rogerson, M., *Crime Incidence, Prevalence and Concentration in NDCs: Implications for Practice*, New Deal for Communities National Evaluation Research Report 45, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, 2005, accessed 27 May 2026

⁴⁰ Alitavoli, R. & Kaveh, E., 'The U.S. Media's Effect on Public's Crime Expectations: A Cycle of Cultivation and Agenda-Setting Theory', *Societies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2018, article 58,

⁴¹ Alitavoli, R. & Kaveh, E., 'The U.S. Media's Effect on Public's Crime Expectations: A Cycle of Cultivation and Agenda-Setting Theory', *Societies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2018, article 58,

⁴² George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli, 'Living with Television: The Dynamics of the Cultivation Process', in Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann (eds), *Perspectives on Media Effects*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ, 1986, pp. 17–40.

George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory is a "sociological concept that posits that our perceptions of social reality are significantly shaped by the messages and depictions we encounter on television."⁴³ The theory suggests that continuous interaction with representations from the media can shape individuals' interpretation of the world, leading them to view filtered depictions as accurate reflections of reality. Although the theory's initial development was influenced by television consumption as it was pioneered in the 1960s,⁴⁴ It should be acknowledged as a product of its era and implemented cautiously when approaching 21st century digital media environments. Nevertheless, the cultivation theory continues to be pertinent in modern culture as adolescents frequently engage with crime in the media through digital media platforms. Consequently, continuous consumption of sensationalised and selective representations of crime in the media may foster the perception that criminal behaviour is more prevalent and severe than statistical data indicates.⁴⁵

Crime-focused media heightens views of crime by emphasising violent and dramatic incidents, making them appear more common and severe than official statistics indicate.⁴⁶ This approach is endorsed by Alitavoli and Kaveh who apply the Cycle of Cultivation and Agenda-Setting Theory, to argue that frequent exposure with crime related media fosters inflated anticipations of criminal occurrences, leading individuals to believe crime is more widespread than what official data indicates. By continuously emphasising violent and dramatic crime narratives, the media can skew the public's perception of the actual frequency of criminal activity in society. George Gerbner characterised this phenomenon as the 'Mean World Syndrome'. "Where individuals exposed to high levels of violent media content perceive the world as more dangerous than it statistically is."⁴⁷ This theory is reinforced by Grabe and Drew, who investigated the association between the consumption of crime-related media and attitudes towards criminal activity. Their findings indicate that crime-focused media can foster exaggerated views of crime prevalence, as viewers may form assumptions of

⁴³ Shari Parsons Miller, 'Cultivation Theory', EBSCO Research Starters (2019) <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/communication-and-mass-media/cultivation-theory> accessed 10 July 2026.

⁴⁴ The Comm Spot, 'Cultivation Theory', The Comm Spot, 10 July 2026.

⁴⁵ Alitavoli, R. & Kaveh, E., 'The U.S. Media's Effect on Public's Crime Expectations: A Cycle of Cultivation and Agenda-Setting Theory', *Societies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2018, article 58

⁴⁶ Alitavoli, R. & Kaveh, E., 'The U.S. Media's Effect on Public's Crime Expectations: A Cycle of Cultivation and Agenda-Setting Theory', *Societies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2018, article 58

⁴⁷ Greene, Jim, MFA, "Mean World Syndrome | Ebsco" (2023)

social reality based on the continuous exposure to mediated portrayals as opposed to objective crime statistics.⁴⁸ Adolescents represent a significant demographic of digital media consumers with OECD statistics revealing that 65% of 15 year old females and 55% of 15 year old males, dedicate three or more hours daily to social media,⁴⁹ thereby heightening their exposure to media representations of crime and violence. According to my questionnaire, 52% of participants felt that the media portrays crime as more prevalent than it actually is, whereas 22% disagreed and 26% were unsure. 56.6% of Northern Beaches respondents stated that the media inflated crime rates, while only 12.5% disagreed. In contrast, Penrith respondents proved to be more sceptical, with only 33.3% feeling crime was exaggerated in the media and 50% believing media representations mirrored the level of crime Penrith experienced⁵⁰. These findings suggest that geographical location influences how adolescents perceive crime in the media. Respondents residing in areas considered to have fewer crime rates, such as the Northern Beaches, were more inclined to regard media depictions as exaggerated, whereas respondents living in areas with higher perceived crime, such as Penrith were more inclined to view these portrayals as a true representation of crime within the local area. This perspective reinforces that regional context affects adolescents' interpretations of crime related media, emphasising the effect of socialisation on social attitudes.

While media depictions of crime may impact adolescents' perceptions of criminal prevalence, viewing the same crime-related media does not produce consistent interpretations. "Polarisation is used to describe a social psychological phenomenon (group polarisation) whereby people adopt more extreme positions after discussion."⁵¹ The portrayal of crime in various media formats shapes perceptions of criminality in diverse ways, indicating that media depictions affect viewers' interpretations of criminal behaviour.⁵² Within crime media, polarisation occurs when adolescents cultivate differing understandings of criminality influenced by their experiences, social contexts, and beliefs.⁵³ Consequently, certain

⁴⁸ Maria Elizabeth Grabe and Dan G. Drew, 'Crime Cultivation: Comparisons Across Media Genres and Channels', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51, no. 1 (2007), 147–171

⁴⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *How's Life for Children in the Digital Age?* (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2025)

⁵⁰ Primary research: Questionnaire

⁵¹ Smith, L. G. E., Thomas, E. F., Bliuc, A.-M. & McGarty, C. (2024), *Communications Psychology*.

⁵² Maria Elizabeth Grabe and Dan G. Drew, 'Crime Cultivation: Comparisons Across Media Genres and Channels', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51, no. 1 (2007), 147–171

⁵³ Hall, S., 'Encoding/Decoding', in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 1972–79, Hutchinson, London, 1980, pp. 128–138

adolescents might cultivate intensified perceptions of criminal danger, whilst others may regard crime depictions as overstated and not reflected in reality.⁵⁴ Furthermore, crime in the media can contribute to affective polarisation, where adolescents cultivate diverse emotional reactions to perpetrators and criminal behaviour. "Affective polarisation refers to increased dislike and hostility towards members of an opposing group."⁵⁵ Within the study of crime media, this contrast may arise from differing emotional reactions to perpetrators and illicit behaviour. Certain individuals may cultivate increased empathy for perpetrators, while others might advocate for more severe penalties, indicating that crime-related media can elicit varied emotional reactions to criminal behaviour.⁵⁶ Consequently, although crime in the media may affect adolescents' perceptions of the frequency of criminal activity, its influence is inconsistent, since interpretation is moulded by personal experiences, social environments, and pre-existing opinions.

Therefore, crime in the media can amplify perceptions regarding crime frequency through cultivation and exaggeration. Nonetheless, adolescents are not passive recipients, their perceptions are influenced by their environment, experiences, and convictions, leading to differing perspectives on criminal activity.

⁵⁴ Grabe, M. E. & Drew, D. G., 'Crime Cultivation: Comparisons Across Media Genres and Channels', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2007, pp. 147–171.

⁵⁵ Smith, L. G. E., Thomas, E. F., Bliuc, A.-M. & McGarty, C. (2024), *Communications Psychology*.

⁵⁶ Albrecht, K. & Nadler, J., 'Assigning Punishment: Reader Responses to Crime News', *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 13, 2022, article 832171, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35250725/>, accessed 22 July 2026.

Conclusion

Contemporary media is becoming increasingly integrated into everyday lives, becoming a significant agent of socialisation in society. Subjecting adolescents to criminality via films, television, news outlets and online media. This Personal Interest Project examined how the glorification of crime in the media influences adolescents attitudes towards criminality. The research demonstrated that, while crime related media can influence adolescents views on crime and criminal activity, its impact is not uniform. Rather, attitudes are shaped by a confluence of media exposure, individual experiences, geographic context, and generational background.

The integration of primary and secondary research corroborated my initial hypothesis, that the glorification of crime in the media influences adolescents' perceptions on criminality. Chapter One illustrated that continual engagement with crime media can cultivate both desensitisation and fascination, indicating that these reactions often coexist rather than emerge separately. Chapter Two disclosed that while media portrayals can foster fear of crime, and in certain instances, admiration for perpetrators, adolescents were predominantly more inclined to feel apprehension rather than cultivate inclinations to engage in criminal activities. Ultimately, Chapter Three revealed that crime media can skew perceptions regarding crime prevalence through cultivation and sensationalism, as well as generating polarised interpretations based on personal experiences and opinions. The combination of my content analysis, questionnaire, and supporting social theories validated these conclusions.

This Personal Interest Project has significantly increased my knowledge on numerous Society and Culture concepts. The media was recognised as an important socialisation agent, impacting adolescents' attitudes and views of delinquency. The continuity and change component indicated that despite methods of consuming criminal media have altered significantly from Generation X to Generation Z, curiosity with crime continues to remain largely constant. Additionally, the cross-cultural comparison between participants from

Penrith and Northern Beaches demonstrated how geographic location affects how crime media is interpreted, confirming that attitudes regarding criminality are influenced by wider social and cultural contexts as opposed to solely media exposure.

Ultimately, this study shows that crime media has a substantial impact on adolescents' views of criminality, yet these effects are mediated by the social and cultural environments in which people reside. Gaining a critical awareness of how crime is portrayed is becoming increasingly crucial as online media continues to influence modern culture.

Resource List

Primary Research

Content Analysis -

- Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story (Netflix series, 2024)
- Criminal Minds (TV series, 2005)
- Adolescence (TV series, 2025)
- Wolf on Wall Street (Film, 2013)
- Goodfellas (Film, 1990)

This content analysis examined five media texts connected to crime from television series and films to explore the representation of crime and whether these portrayals foster fascination, desensitisation, or altered perceptions of criminality among adolescents. The Wolf on Wall Street and Goodfellas demonstrate how crime can be glorified despite its moral and legal repercussions by using wealth, status, and power to depict criminals. On the other hand, Criminal minds and Adolescence portrays crime as destructive rather than aspirational, emphasising the psychological, social, and emotional effects of criminal activity. Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story explored on how contemporary crime dramas may elicit empathy for offenders by showcasing intricate personal histories and provoking viewers to consider criminal culpability.

Through the examination of these texts, I was able to recognise recurrent themes on how crime is portrayed in the media, such as the glamourisation of criminals, sensationalised narratives, emotive framing, and the normalisation of violence. This content analysis produced significant qualitative insights, the chosen texts vary between true crime, biographical adaptations, and fictional crime drama. While many are based on real occurrences, each narrative employs dramatisation, editing, and storytelling methods intended to captivate viewers, suggesting they may not consistently depict crime or the criminal justice system with sufficient accuracy. Nonetheless, this content analysis proved to be immensely beneficial as it augmented my questionnaire results and secondary research, strengthening my study into the potential effects of repeated exposure to crime media on adolescents' attitudes, behaviour and perceptions of criminality.

Questionnaire -

This questionnaire was crucial to my research by gathering both quantitative and qualitative data regarding adolescents media consumption, perceptions on crime, and attitudes towards criminality. A total of 23 respondents from the Northern Beaches LGA and Penrith LGA participated in the questionnaire, consisting mainly of Generation Z (43.5%), along with contributions from Generation X, Millennials, and Baby Boomers, enabling both cross-generational and a regional analysis of perceptions regarding crime in the media. The questionnaire investigated participants' engagement with crime-related media, degrees of intrigue and desensitisation, beliefs about crime frequency, and the extent to which media shaped their perspectives on criminal conduct. Despite the small sample size limiting the generalisability of the results, the questionnaire produced significant primary evidence that strengthened my secondary research and content analysis.

Personal Reflection -

This personal reflection was used as a qualitative and quantitative research method to examine my own experiences with crime in the media and how they affected my views of criminality. This topic is especially significant to me as a member of Generation Z because I was constantly exposed to crime films, documentaries, news media, and online material growing up. I was able to understand how a fascination crime might develop through repeated exposure by thinking back on my experiences, especially viewing crime media with my father and discussing criminal cases together. This methodology provided valuable insight into my personal connection with the topic, also contributing to both the cross-cultural and continuity and change component. However, it can not be generalised since it is inherently subjective. However, it improved my understanding of the cultural and sociological factors influencing teenagers perspectives on crime

Secondary Research

Akbaş E and Kiliç İşleyen E, “The Effect of Digital Game Addiction on Aggression and Anger Levels in Adolescents: A Cross-Sectional Study” (2024) 52 Archives of Psychiatric Nursing 106.

This article examines the effects of digital game addiction on aggression and anger levels amongst adolescents. The main ideas expressed are that adolescents exhibiting elevated levels of digital gaming addiction are more prone to manifest heightened hostility and rage. The research additionally revealed that extended engagement with digital games, especially those including violence, correlated with increased aggressive behaviours. The article proved beneficial as it reinforced my discourse on the potential impact of crime themed digital games on the attitudes and behaviours of adolescents. Nonetheless, its concentration on digital gaming addiction constrained its relevance to my PIP inquiry into criminality across any media formats. This article is pertinent to my topic as it offers contemporary, peer-reviewed data that substantiates the impact of digital media on the perspectives and actions of adolescents.

Albrecht K and Nadler J, “Assigning Punishment: Reader Responses to Crime News” (2022) 13 Frontiers in Psychology.

The article highlights the emotional reactions of readers to crime reports and the impact of these reactions on their perceptions of perpetrators and suitable penalties. The author’s research focuses on the influence of crime reporting on the emotional responses of readers towards perpetrators, shaping their capacity to cultivate empathy for offenders or endorse more severe penalties. The authors suggest that media framing influences public perceptions of crime and justice. This article holds usefulness for my research since it presented evidence demonstrating that crime-related media can elicit a variety of emotional responses, confirming my argument that audiences may sympathise with offenders or support for more severe punishments. Nevertheless, the study's narrow focus on crime news restricts its relevance to broader studies on crime in films, TV shows, and social media. This article supports my thesis since it indicates how people’s perceptions of criminals and criminal activity are influenced by how crime is portrayed in the media. Specifically, it reinforced my hypothesis that the presentation of criminal activities in crime media might elicit a range of emotional reactions.

Alitavoli R and Kaveh E, 'The U.S. Media's Effect on Public's Crime Expectations: A Cycle of Cultivation and Agenda-Setting Theory', *Societies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2018, art. 58.

The article examines the media's effects on public crime expectations through the cycle of cultivation and agenda-setting theory, claiming that people's perceptions of crime in society are shaped by their frequent exposure to crime in the news. The main points are that regular consumption of sensationalised crime news can foster the perception that crime is more prevalent and severe than it actually is. The authors contend that by emphasising specific crime stories, the media shapes public opinion and leads viewers to overestimate the frequency of criminal activity. This article supported my argument of how media representations can skew adolescents' views of crime prevalence with theoretical and empirical data, which was helpful for my research. However, because the article's main focus is on American news media, its conclusions could not apply to Australian culture in its whole. This article is pertinent to my thesis since it supports the claim that people's views of criminal behaviour can be influenced by the repeated exposure to sensationalised crime reporting.

Bandura A and Internet Archive, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977)

<https://archive.org/details/sociallearningth0000band/page/n9/mode/2up> accessed 27 July 2026.

This article examines Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, focusing on how individuals learn new behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions through observation, imitation, and modelling in a social setting. The key concepts conveyed are that humans learn by observing other people's actions and the repercussions of their actions. Bandura contends that people are more likely to imitate activities that appear to be rewarded rather than punished. This material was valuable to my research because it presented the underlying sociological theory that underpins my discussion of how adolescents can adopt attitudes and actions from crime depicted in the media. However, since the book was released in 1977, it lacks the examination of the impact of modern online media and social media platforms. This source is highly permanent to my thesis since it offers a theoretical framework in understanding how media depictions of crime can alter adolescents' views of criminality. It reinforced my argument in Chapter 2 by demonstrating how behaviours may be learned through observation and imitation.

Brown M 1996. The portrayal of violence in the media: impacts and implications for policy. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice no. 55. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi55>

This report investigates the media's representation of violence and its potential impact on people's actions. The primary points made are that while research shows a link between exposure to media violence and violent Behavior, it fails to demonstrate a direct casual relationship. In contrast, repeated exposure may raise the chance of aggressive behaviors and mindsets within some individuals. This report was helpful as it offered balanced, evidence-based support for my discussion on media violence in chapter 2. However, because it was published in 1996, it does not consider the impact of modern online media and social media platforms on adolescents.

Crone EA and Konijn EA, “Media Use and Brain Development During Adolescence” (2018) 9 Nature Communications <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-03126-x> accessed 27 July 2026.

This article investigates how media use affects adolescent brain development, claiming that the developing adolescent brain is especially vulnerable to media exposure due to continuous cognitive, emotional, and social growth. The key arguments conveyed that adolescence is a critical time of brain development, which makes adolescents more susceptible to emotionally charged media. The authors claim that adolescents' increased emotional sensitivity and growing cognitive control render them to be more vulnerable to media impacts. This article was helpful in my research since it gave scientific data explaining why adolescents are more vulnerable to the effects of crime-related media compared to adults. However, this article explores media use in general instead of focusing on crime media or criminal activity. These findings are pertinent to my research since it supports the claim that adolescents are especially susceptible to media influences based on their stage of brain development. It supported my argument in Chapter 2 by demonstrating why crime-related media may have a larger influence on adolescents' attitudes and views of criminality.

“Cultivation Theory – The Comm Spot” (2025)

<https://thecommspot.com/communication-basics/communication-theories/cultivation-theory/> accessed 27 July 2026.

This website analyses Gerbner's Cultivation theory and how people's ideas of reality are shaped by extended media exposure. The key points are that audiences' worldviews are gradually cultivated by regular media exposure, leading people to believe that media representations accurately reflect reality. The hypothesis was initially established in the 1960s to investigate the impacts of television consumption, according to the website. This website was helpful for my study since it supported my presentation of Cultivation theory in Chapter 3 by giving a thorough explanation of the theory and its historical evolution. However, it was mostly used to explain the theory as opposed to a peer-academic source, as it is an educational website rather than a peer-reviewed source. This website is relevant to my thesis since it supports my explanation of how repeated media exposure changes perceptions on crime. It helped explain the origins of the Cultivation Theory before applying it to modern criminal media.

Dinneen S, 'Real-life Wolf of Wall Street Jordan Belfort Reveals Why the UK Will Survive Brexit', City A.M., 2019,

<https://www.cityam.com/real-life-wolf-of-wall-street-jordan-belfort-talks-about-glamourising-fraud-and-surviving-brexite/> accessed 21 July 2026.

The article explores Jordan Belfort's criminal history, his public persona after The Wolf on Wall Street, and the media's ongoing fascination in his story. The primary points made are that Jordan Belfort's tale continues to attract significant amounts of media attention and that he is still a well-known public figure despite his criminal convictions. This article was useful for my study since it supplied the image of Jordan Belfort, which I utilised on my title page to visually introduce the issue of crime and media representation. Nevertheless, it was not utilised as an academic source or to back up the arguments made in my PIP. The article conveys meaning to my study since Jordan Belfort's image immediately conveys the idea of the media's glamourisation of criminals. It establishes the fundamental theme of my research before I begin writing the analysis.

Dolliver MJ and others, “Examining the Relationship Between Media Consumption, Fear of Crime, and Support for Controversial Criminal Justice Policies Using a Nationally Representative Sample” (2018) 34 Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice 399.

The relationship between media consumption, the fear of crime and public support for justice measures is examined in this article, establishing the argument that media exposure has a major impact on public opinions and perceptions of crime. The key points made are that increased media exposure is linked to higher levels of support for severe criminal justice policies and increased fear of crime. The authors contend that people's perceptions of crime can be influenced by repeated exposure of crime in the media, even if these perceptions do not accurately represent crime statistics. This article was beneficial for my research since it supported my explanation in Chapter 2 with actual data showing that crime media is more likely to raise fear of crime than to promote criminal conduct. However, the study's direct application to my target demographic is limited due to its focus on the entire population rather than specifically adolescents.

Figure 1. Adapted from Jeanne Funk Brockmyer, ‘Media Violence, Desensitization, and Psychological Engagement’, in Karen E. Dill (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Media Psychology (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013).

This book chapter explores the connection between psychological engagement, digitisation, and media violence. It makes the case that frequent exposure to violent media can lessen people's emotional reactivity and have an impact on their future media and their future media consumption. The major points made are that exposure to violent media on a regular basis might cause psychological desensitisation, which eventually lessens emotional responses to violence. The chapter also looks at how viewers' interaction with violent media might encourage more consumption, resulting in an endless cycle of exposure and desensitisation. The theoretical foundation for the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1, which depicts the cyclical relationship between fascination, repetitive exposure, and desensitisation, was provided by this chapter, which was helpful for my research. Nevertheless, the chapter conducts a comprehensive examination of violent media, rather than concentrating on the glorification of crime or adolescents. The source is of great importance to my thesis because it substantiates the contention that continuous exposure to crime-related media can result in desensitisation and prolonged engagement with crime content.

George G, Larry G, Michael M and Nancy S, 'Living with Television: The Dynamics of the Cultivation Process', in Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann (eds), Perspectives on Media Effects (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ, 1986), pp. 17–40.

This book chapter examines the dynamics of the Cultivation process, positing that the protracted exposure to television has an impact on the way in which individuals perceive social reality. The primary concepts conveyed are that individuals who watch an excessive amount of television are more inclined to accept the beliefs, values, and perceptions depicted in media as accurate representations of the real world. The authors contend that viewers' comprehension of society is progressively developed through frequent exposure to media messages. This article supported my discussion of how excessive media exposure might affect adolescents' perceptions of crime by providing the original theoretical framework for the Cultivation Theory, which was helpful for my research. Nevertheless, this book chapter was released in 1986 and concentrates on television as opposed to more modern technologies like social media and streaming services. This source discusses how frequent media exposure can alter people's ideas of reality, which makes it extremely pertinent to my research. Specifically, it reinforced my explanation in Chapter 3 by bolstering my claim that regular exposure to crime-related media can affect people's perceptions of how common criminal conduct is in society.

Grabe ME and Drew DG, "Crime Cultivation: Comparisons Across Media Genres and Channels" (2007) 51 Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 147.

This article investigates connection between peoples perceptions of crime across various media genres and channels and their consumption of crime-related media. The major points made are that frequent exposure to crime-related media can lead to inflated views of the frequency of crime and heightened anxiety about it. The authors contend that audiences frequently rely their perceptions of social reality on media representations rather than factual crime data, and that these effects differ depending on the type of media. This article was helpful for my research since it showed how crime-related media can skew public opinions of crime and offered empirical evidence in favour of Cultivation Theory. However, the study's immediate relevance to my research is limited because it concentrates on the general population rather than adolescents in particular. This article is extremely pertinent to my thesis because it bolsters my claim that people may overestimate the frequency of criminal action as a result of frequent exposure to crime-related media. Specifically, it reinforced my

discussion in Chapter 3 by demonstrating that media representations have a greater influence on how people perceive social reality than do official crime data.

Greene J, “Mean World Syndrome | EBSCO” (2023)

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/communication-and-mass-media/mean-world-syndrome> accessed 27 July 2026.

This article explores Mean World Syndrome, elucidating how frequent exposure to violent and criminal media might cause people to believe that the world is more hazardous than it truly is. The major points made are that audiences may develop inflated perceptions of danger as a result of regular exposure to crime and violence in the media, leading them to overestimate the frequency of crime and increase their dread of being victims. The essay also discusses how Gerbner's Cultivation Theory and Mean World Syndrome are closely related. This article supported my argument of how repeated exposure to crime media might skew perceptions of crime prevalence and gave a good explanation of Mean World Syndrome, which was helpful for my research. However, it was mostly used to describe the idea rather than offer unique empirical data because it is a research beginning rather than a peer-reviewed journal article. This article supports the claim that media coverage of crime can affect people's perceptions of how common crime is in society, which makes it pertinent to my thesis. Specifically, it clarified how repeated media exposure might lead to an inflated sense of danger and insecurity, which reinforced my comments in Chapter 3.

Hegger J, “6 Traits That Lead to Criminal Behavior” (2015)

<https://www.police1.com/corrections/articles/6-traits-that-lead-to-criminal-behavior-QKg2lpUaZbdKL1ot/> accessed 27 July 2026.

This article explores the elements that lead to criminal activity and makes the case that a mix of environmental and individual risk factors, such as opportunities, motivations, and personal circumstances, have an impact on criminal behaviour. The key points made are that criminal activity happens when specific circumstances come together, such as the existence of a motive, the ability to commit a crime and an opportunity to act. The article also emphasises how risk variables might influence criminal behaviour and ongoing offences. This article clarified terms like risk factors, motives, and opportunities and background information on the evolution of criminal behaviour, which was beneficial for my research. However, it does not directly address how the media affects adolescents' perceptions of crime, which limits its relevance to my main thesis. The article is pertinent to my research since, prior to analysing how media representations may affect teenagers' perceptions of crime, it offered a basic grasp

of the variables influencing criminal activity. Specifically, it helped me illustrate in Chapter 2 that media exposure is not the only factor influencing criminal activity.

Hogan MJ, “Adolescents and Media Violence: Six Crucial Issues for Practitioners” (2005) 16 Adolescent Medicine Clinics 249.

This article examines how exposure to violent media can affect adolescents attitudes, feelings, and behaviours, this article explores the connection between adolescents and media violence. The major points made are that adolescents who are exposed to violent media may develop aggressive thoughts, emotional reactions, fear, and desensitisation. According to the report, some adolescents are more susceptible to the negative impacts of violent media than others, due to individual and developmental variations. This article was helpful for my research since it supported my claim that adolescents may react psychologically to crime and violent media in a variety of ways, including dread and desensitisation. But rather than concentrating on the glorification of criminal activity, the study focuses more widely on media violence. This article is pertinent to my thesis since it bolsters my claim that, because of their developmental stage, adolescents are especially impacted by media depictions. It reinforced my Chapter 2 discourse in particular by showing how crime media can have a variety of effects, such as heightened anxiety, desensitisation, and changed perceptions of criminality.

Jared S, “Why Are We Fascinated by True Crime?” (2024)

<https://www.unc.edu/posts/2024/01/11/why-are-we-fascinated-by-true-crime/> accessed 27 July 2026.

This article explores why people are fascinated by real-life criminal cases and stories and looks at the psychological and societal factors that contribute to audiences' attraction with true crime. The primary points made are that audiences are drawn to true crime because they are curious about the motivations behind crimes, are concerned about justice and the legal system, and find it appealing to solve real-life mysteries. According to the article, curiosity with crime does not always indicate sympathy for illegal activity but rather a desire to comprehend human conduct and misbehaviour. This article was helpful since it clarified why viewers interact with crime media, however it is not subject to peer review, as it offers broad conclusions rather than in depth study data. This article is pertinent to my thesis as it bolsters my claim that criminal media captures viewers interest through psychological engagement and curiosity, which helps to explain why viewers watch crime-related information without necessarily desiring to commit crimes.

Krahé B and others, “Desensitization to Media Violence: Links with Habitual Media Violence Exposure, Aggressive Cognitions, and Aggressive Behavior” (2011) 100 Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 630

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4522002/> accessed 27 July 2026.

Desensitization to Media Violence: Links With Habitual Media Violence Exposure, Aggressive Cognitions, and Aggressive Behavior. The authors contend that exposure to violent media on a regular basis might desensitise people to violence and promote aggressive ideas and behaviours, indicating that media has a big influence on how people view violence. The article suggests that regular exposure to violent media causes desensitisation, resulting in people to be less sensitive to violence on an emotional level. According to its findings, this desensitisation is associated with more aggressive ideas and actions, demonstrating how media exposure can affect how teenagers view and react to violence. The article supports my discussion of how media can affect teenage attitudes toward crime by offering strong evidence that links media exposure to desensitisation and increased violence. However, it is less relevant to the more complex ways that the media can influence perceptions of criminality because it focuses primarily on violent media and aggressiveness rather than the glorifying or glamourization of crime. This source is helpful because it offers trustworthy proof that media exposure can change opinions by desensitising people. It supports what I argue, but it is limited because it emphasises violence rather than the glorification of crime. Therefore, it will be utilised in conjunction with other sources for a more thorough examination.

Legal Literate “Premeditated Crime | Legal Literate” (2024)

<https://www.legalliterate.org.au/legal-term/premeditated-crime/> accessed 27 July 2026.

The legal definition of premeditated crime is explained on this website, which distinguishes between crimes committed impulsively and those involving intentional planning. The primary points made are that intent and prior thoughts are necessary in regards to premeditated crime before they are committed. The Background Information in Chapter 2, where I made a distinction between planned and unpremeditated crime, was supported by this website's clear and straightforward legal definition. However, it was mostly utilised to define legal terms due to it being an educational website rather than a peer reviewed academic source. All things considered, it gave my research on adolescents' perceptions of criminality a strong legal framework.

Shelly, “Uhomes.Com Blogs: Student Guides on Living, Travel, Lifestyle” (2024)
<<https://en.uhomes.com/blog/safest-and-most-dangerous-suburbs-in-sydney>> accessed July 29, 2026

This article investigates crime rates in Sydney suburbs, comparing reported incidents to determine locations with higher and lower levels of criminal activity. The key points made are that crime incidents vary greatly by geographic location, with suburbs like Penrith recording relatively high numbers of offenses across many crime categories. This article was beneficial since it provided current crime statistics to assist my comparison of the northern beaches and Penrith LGAs in Chapter 3. However, because it is a property and lifestyle website rather than a peer reviewed academic source, it was mostly used to provide descriptive crime data. Overall it enhanced my analysis of how geographical location influences adolescents of crime.

Miller SP, “Cultivation Theory | EBSCO” (2024)
<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/communication-and-mass-media/cultivation-theory> accessed 27 July 2026.

This article investigates George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, which explains how continuous media exposure shapes people's conceptions of social reality. The main points addressed about prolonged exposure to media messages can cause viewers to perceive mediated portrayals as realistic representations of Reality. This article was helpful since it gave an adequate description of the Cultivation Theory, which supported my discussion of how crime media can influence adolescence perceptions of criminality and crime prevalence. However, due to it being an educational summary rather than a peer-reviewed publication, its primary purpose was to explain the theory. Overall it reinforced the theoretical basis for my Chapter 3 analysis.

Mrug S, Madan A and Windle M, “Emotional Desensitization to Violence Contributes to Adolescents’ Violent Behavior” (2016) 44 Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology 75
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4539292/> accessed 27 July 2026.

This article investigates emotional desensitisation to violence in teenagers and its association with aggressive behavior. The major principles conveyed are that frequent exposure to violence can lead to emotional desensitisation, which reduces people's emotional responses to violence events over time and increases the chance of aggressive behaviour. This article was beneficial since it provided a clear academic explanation of desensitisation, which complemented my discussion in Chapter 1 about how repeated exposure to criminal media

can modify teenagers' emotional responses. However the study focuses on violence in general rather than crime media specifically. Overall it increased the theoretical basis for my research into media-induced desensitisation

OECD, “How Is Life for Children in the Digital Age?: Full Report” (2025)

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/how-s-life-for-children-in-the-digital-age_0854b900-en/full-report.html accessed 27 July 2026.

The OECD article looks at children's well-being in the digital era, including how digital technologies and social media affect teenagers' development, health, and daily life. The primary points made are that teenagers are spending an increasing amount of time engaging with digital media, with many utilising social media for many hours each day, subjecting them to both opportunities and threats. This article was valuable since it presented new statistical evidence on adolescents' media usage, which supported my argument about their high exposure to digital media. However, it looks at digital media in general, not only crime-related information. Overall, it enhanced the contextual underpinning of my research into how adolescents are exposed to crime in the media.

Przybylski AK and Weinstein N, “Violent Video Game Engagement Is Not Associated with Adolescents’ Aggressive Behaviour: Evidence from a Registered Report” (2019) 6 Royal Society Open Science

<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.171474> accessed 27 July 2026.

This article investigates the link between violent video game play and aggressive behaviour among adolescents. The primary points made are that there is little evidence to show a link between playing violent video games and increasing real-world aggressiveness among adolescents. The authors contend that past claims relating violent games to aggressive behaviour may have exaggerated the association. This article was valuable since it provided a different perspective, helping me to recognise contradicting evidence in my investigation. However, it focuses on violent games rather than criminal media in general. Overall, it improved the balance of my research by presenting opposing viewpoints.

Rogerson M, “Crime Incidence, Prevalence and Concentration in NDCs: Implications for Practice” (University of Huddersfield, 2021)

<https://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/1361/> accessed 27 July 2026.

This research explores the concepts of crime incidence, prevalence, and concentration, demonstrating how crime trends are recorded and evaluated within communities. The major concepts conveyed are that crime prevalence refers to the proportion of individuals or targets who are victimised in a specific location, as opposed to the frequency or concentration of

incidents. This paper was useful since it gave a clear academic definition of criminal prevalence, which served as the framework for my Chapter 3 discussion. However, it focuses on crime measurement rather than the media's impact on crime perceptions. Overall, it provided an important conceptual framework for investigating how crime incidence is perceived in society.

Saul M, “Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory” (2025)

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html> accessed 27 July 2026.

This page outlines Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which describes how people learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. The basic ideas conveyed are that people are more likely to emulate behaviours that they see being rewarded, especially when the model is viewed as successful or important. This article was valuable since it gave a clear and understandable description of Social Learning Theory, which supported my discussion of how teenagers can develop attitudes about crime through media exposure. However, because it is an educational website rather than a peer-reviewed academic source, it was mostly used to explain the theory. Overall, it reinforced the theoretical basis for my Chapter 2 analysis.

Smith LGE and others, “Polarization Is the Psychological Foundation of Collective Engagement” (2024) 2 Communications Psychology 1

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s44271-024-00089-2> accessed 27 July 2026.

This article examines physiological polarisation and how discussing things with other people can make them more radical in their views and opinions. The main argument for how polarisation works is that this polarisation effect occurs in interactions between groups. Through this, individuals can adopt stronger, oftentimes more extreme views than before. The article was helpful as it gave a clear definition of group polarisation which allowed me to show how relationship and media exposure can intensify attitudes toward crime. However, instead of focusing only on crime or youth, it looks at polarisation in general. Taking everything into account, it gave substance to the theoretical underpinnings of my study of shifting perceptions of criminality.

Stuart H, ‘Encoding/Decoding’, in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 1972–79 (Hutchinson, London, 1980), pp. 128–138,

<https://archive.org/details/culturemedialang0000unse> accessed 27 July 2026.

This book chapter investigates Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding to explain the active sense-making of consumers in relation to media messages. The main ideas from the chapter are that people have varying interpretations of media depending on their own experiences socially and culturally. The chapter was useful since it confirmed my argument regarding why adolescents with identical exposure to media about crimes hold different perspectives on

criminal behaviour. Nonetheless, unlike focusing on media that have to do with crime, the chapter takes a broader perspective when it comes to the interpretation of media. In summary, it confirmed my argument through explaining the impact of social context on media description.

Tompsett CJ, Amrhein KE and Hassan S, “Travel Beyond the Home Neighborhood for Delinquent Behaviors: Moderation of Home Neighborhood Influences” (2014) 37 Journal of Adolescence 325.

This article highlights how the attributes of a neighborhood affect teenagers delinquent behaviour, particularly in situations where adolescents venture out of their neighbourhoods. The main arguments in this article include that teenagers who come from neighbourhoods characterized by low collective efficacy, low prosocial norms, and high exposure to factors that motivate the engagement in crime tend to get involved in delinquency. This article proved useful in supporting my comparison of the Northern Beaches and Penrith LGAs since it demonstrated how the context of the region affects adolescents in terms of behaviour and attribute. Nonetheless, this article focuses on neighbourhood effects as opposed to media exposure.

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Social Media and Youth Mental Health (Office of the Surgeon General, 2025)
<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/youth-mental-health/social-media/index.html> accessed 27 July 2026**

This report discusses the effect of social media on the mental wellbeing of adolescents and the effect that brain development has in making the youth susceptible to social media. The main concepts stated in the report are the facts that adolescents experience critical brain development and therefore, are emotionally sensitive and susceptible to risky behavior due to their high level of susceptibility to social media. This particular report was helpful to me since it provided scientific evidence for the reasons why adolescents are vulnerable to crime media. The limitation of this particular report is that it focuses on social media generally and not crime media specifically.