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Copycat Crime

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Copycat Crime

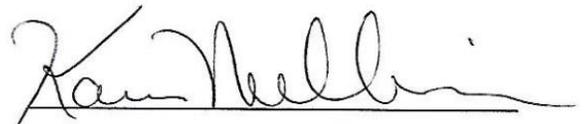
An Honors College Thesis

By

Jamie LiCausi

Fall 2017

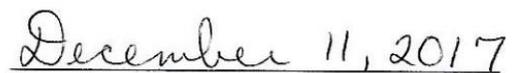
Forensic Science

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Karen Nelson", written over a horizontal line.

Faculty Advisor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pasquale Appella", written over a horizontal line.

Reader

A handwritten date in cursive script, "December 11, 2017", written over a horizontal line.

Date

Abstract

This Honors thesis explores the links between media and copycat crime, and what media factors influence the triggering of copycat crime. Many scientists propose different psychological mechanisms that cause people to copy crimes portrayed in media. Copycat crime occurs on a global scale, and different countries have implemented various government policies to prevent the growth of media generated copycat crime. By examining the policies enforced by different countries, this paper proposes a solution to this growing social problem. Overall, the purpose is to identify why copycat crimes occur, and how they can be prevented for the future.

Several case studies where people have deliberately copied crime portrayed through various media sources are discussed. Additionally, many of the articles provide examples where too much information may have been given away in media content. In all, the people mentioned in those articles admit to being inspired by media. Studies have also been conducted on the relationship between media and copycat crime. Several of the studies included in this paper conducted surveys on inmates of all different ages, races, social background, etc. In the studies, participants said they found media as a helpful crime tool. Some studies have even discovered which sources the participants found most useful.

In the end, it was difficult to decipher which psychological mechanism was the main cause of media generated copycat crime. Many of the authors cited in the paper emphasize the need for further research. Yet many agree that multiple mechanisms may be to blame. Most believe that media acts as a catalyst for copycat crime. Some argue that crime would still exist without media, but how crime happens may be inspired by media content. It is clear that media generated copycat crime is a prevalent issue in multiple societies. This issue is also discussed

throughout numerous disciplines. That is why it is critical that more attention be given to this ever growing social problem.

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Introduction

Entertaining crime emerged during the 1930s when radio began dramatizing police cases for entertainment. In the 1940s, crime films became increasingly popular. Films included semi-documentaries about police procedurals, where producers used actual tapes recorded by the police to create a sense of realism. By the 1980s, reality crime programs were established on television. These programs claimed to present true stories about crimes, criminals, and victims. Examples of reality crime shows include America's Most Wanted, Cops, Forensic Files, and Cold Case Files, to name a few. Today, there are as many as forty reality crime shows, if not more. When they first emerged, the purpose of reality crime programs was to resemble aspects of the news, but were to be aired during prime time, much like entertainment shows. These programs became very popular worldwide. Eventually, news and television shows began to work together, and a large portion of viewers perceived, and still perceive, such programs as news. As Ray Surette wrote in his book *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice*, "media are among the most powerful sources of information."

Ray Surette, an internationally recognized scholar in media, crime, and justice, defines crime as a crucial social problem rooted in related social problems (*Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice*). According to Dictionary.com, a copycat crime is a crime committed in imitation of another crime, especially one that is sensational and highly publicized. In all his writings, Ray Surette describes copycat crimes as being linked in form or motivation to a prior media portrayed crime (Surette, 2015). Lambie, Randell, and McDowell, authors of "Inflaming Your Neighbors": Copycat Fire Setting in Adolescence, more specifically define a copycat crime as being explicitly linked to a publicized crime, where aspects of the original model must be included in the new offending behavior. It is important to note, for research conducted on this topic, many scientists

define media to include the following: television, films, music, music videos, video games, internet, radio, newspapers, books, and magazines. Criminal justice guru, Ray Surette, also lists media to include print, electronics, sound, visual, news, entertainment, infotainment, and new media (Surette, 2013). One final important term to define is criminal justice. The literal meaning of criminal justice is the system of law enforcement that is directly involved in apprehending, prosecuting, defending, sentencing, and punishing those who are suspected or convicted of criminal offenses (Oxford Dictionaries). Yet critics like Surette define criminal justice as “a key function of the state that is less powerful with regards to our safety” (Surette, 2007).

Ray Surette explains in the twenty first century, crime, justice, and media, are wedded. In other words, there is an explicit relationship that exists between crime and media. According to Ray Surette, one in four individuals will engage in copycat crimes (Surette, 2013). The problem occurs when audiences are no longer able to distinguish the line between crime and justice news and entertainment. Viewers become trapped in looping, or blurring of fact and fiction. Ray Surette claims, now, more than ever, mediated experience is closer to actual experiences. As a result, audiences are “encouraged to react to television murderers not with ‘my God how horrible’ but with ‘how curious, I wonder how it was done’ reaction (Surette, 2007). With this in mind, research indicates social media encourages society not only to be curious about crime, but terrorism and suicide as well. Issues about the correlation between media and crime is relevant today because of the extensive media presence in society in addition to the increased number of homicides, robberies, and aggressive assault rates in many of the nation’s largest cities since 2016 (Time, 2017). Additionally, there are daily news reports of school shootings and stabbings, terrorist’s threats, and suicide attempts presented on various media formats like television, Facebooks, etc. Statistics show that murder accounts for 45% of crime in newspapers and 80% of

television shows (Surette, 2007). More content is made available to people today because of different the formats such as cell phones, tablets, lap tops, etc. By having more access to media through these different formats, it is easier to communicate and spread messages to a larger audience. Experts claim that before a child reaches adolescence, they will have seen a thousand murders on TV. Before a child graduates from elementary school that same child will have seen about eight thousand (Loges and Ball-Rokeach, 2002). The growing relationship between media and crime is also experiencing effects on government policy. The White House has become involved in crime policy, whereas it used to be left to local governments. Courtrooms are also experiencing “The CSI Effect.” This effect is a belief held by law enforcement personnel and prosecutors that reality crime shows influence American jurors to expect more forensic evidence in order to convict defendants of crimes (Roberts, 2017). Moreover, there are dozens of examples and case studies that highlight the influence of media on crime.

It is critical that the United States, as well as other countries, find a way to fix the evident problem between copycat crime and social media. In a poll, two out of three Americans said they believe TV violence is an important cause of crime in the United States. One fourth of Americans specify that they believe movies, TV, and internet are the primary cause of gun violence (Surette, 2007). If society does not demand more research on this issue, and as technology becomes more advanced, the more real media becomes, the more the audience’s perception on reality will be altered. Therefore, the audience will become closer to actual crime experiences. Media has the power to communicate to a large group of people, and therefore it must be used cautiously.

Overall, the goal of this paper is to determine if there is a link between media and copycat crime. If there is a direct relationship between media consumption and the presence of copycat

crime, one goal is to determine if there is a single model that explains why individuals copy crime or whether it may be a combination of several models. Not only will the relationship between media and copycat crime be examined in the United States, but this paper will examine crime data on a global scale. With that said, by analyzing copycat crime data from several different countries, the effects of governmental policies for individual countries will also be explored. Furthermore, by analyzing copycat crime data in different countries with different governmental policies to control the presence of copycat crime, a solution to this growing social problem will be proposed.

Part One: Proposed Models for the Explanation of Copycat Crime

Many experts have expressed their concern about the media's generation of copycat crimes and behaviors. Psychologists, news journalists, politicians, forensic scientists, judges, lawyers, and other experts agree that media influenced copycat behavior is spreading and that it is urgent to conduct more research to find the cause and a solution. Although many agree it is an evident and growing issue, many disagree on the causes of criminogenic copycat behavior. Several experts have proposed different models to explain why people have become more influenced by media.

Observational Learning

One model researchers propose is that criminogenic copycat behavior is acquired by observational learning, especially from media sources. Albert Bandura, a psychologist at Stanford University, explores psychological mechanisms of communications that are believed to effect human thought. In his article, *Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communications*, Bandura said that human behavior can be explained in terms of triadic reciprocal causation, where

personal factors, behavioral patterns, and environmental events influence each other bidirectionally. In this case, it is not a single pathway that affects behavior, rather several different determinates that do. He suggests the social cognitive theory explains the phenomena of media influenced criminogenic behavior. The social cognitive theory describes that portions of an individual's knowledge are based on observing interactions, experiences, and outside media influences. "Most external influences affect behavior through cognitive process rather than directly" (Bandura, 2001). This means that an individual's cognitive factors will determine what to observe in the surrounding environment, the individual's interpretation, whether there will be lasting effects, and how new information will be organize for future use. Albert Bandura discusses the significance of other attributes that affect people's behaviors, like self-regulatory capability, self-reflective capability, and vicarious capability on human behavior (Bandura, 2001).

Self-regulation capability allows an individual to evaluate reactions to their own behavior through internal standards. Internal standards regulate an individual's conduct. Regulatory influencers are things that violate or change one's personal standards. In this case, media is the regulatory influencer. Therefore, regulatory influencers, such as media, can impact one's behavior. Meanwhile, self-reflective capability is a person's ability to reflect on one's self, thoughts, and actions. Effective cognitive functioning of self-reflective capability requires an individual to distinguish between accurate and faulty thinking. People come up with ideas and either act on them, or predict what might happen afterwards. Then, their thoughts are evaluated by comparing how well their thoughts match reality. Through misconceptions of enactive, vicarious, social, and logical verification, media versions of social reality can distort actual views of reality and alter efficacy beliefs. Such beliefs determine if individuals think optimistically or

pessimistically, self-enhancing or self- debilitating. They also determine actions individuals will choose to pursue, their goals and their commitment to them, and how much effort they will decide to put in. Distorted views of reality because of media and one's efficacy, an individual may be led to participate in copycat behaviors. Finally, vicarious capability is learning from one's own experiences. Social learning occurs from models in one's immediate environment. Through observational learning, media sources can transmit new ideas, behaviors, and interpretations of reality. According to Bandura, people act on their images of reality. Hence, the greater people's views of reality are more dependent on media, the greater the social impact (Bandura, 2001).

In the article, "Inflaming Your Neighbors": Copycat Firesetting in Adolescents (2013), the authors support the idea that consumption of violent media influences aggressive behavior and copycat crimes in offending populations. With support of the social learning theory, the authors of this article suggest children and adolescents are more likely to become desensitized, "primed", and "alter scripts," or media content, through observational learning, and that these processes are mediated by the individual, the environment, and media factors. In other words, the more exposed young individuals are to media, the less likely they are to react to certain media content. This therefore makes them more susceptible to consume certain types of media, in this case copycat crime. Then, the individuals will adjust the content to fit with reality. The authors' focus on children and adolescents because of their belief that this population is more vulnerable to such effects of media. Lambie, Randell, and Mcdowell suspect that this group is more susceptible to copycat behavior because of observational learning, where children learn by mimicking behaviors that have been observed. By habitually engaging in such activity, children develop lower physiological reactivity to violence. The authors also state that the copycat effect

does not only reflect imitated behaviors, but can increase engagement in similar or related behaviors. Younger audiences become primed to enact on specific behaviors when existing ideas or concepts are activated when viewing media. This influences the viewer's interpretation of an ambiguous stimulus, strengthens beliefs that aggressive behavior is desirable, and increases the potential for similar behaviors to occur (Lambie, et al., 2013). Furthermore, individual's scripts are activated by exposure to violent media content.

Dose Effect

Lambie, Randell, and Mcdowell (2013) also support the dose-response effect which explains the more times an individual is exposed to something, the more likely it is to have an effect, especially for younger viewers. Hence, the more an individual views crime from sources such as social media and other technological media sources, the more likely that individual is to be affected by the content, and demonstrate criminogenic behaviors (Lambie, et al., 2013).

Albert Bandura suggests two other ways in which media affects individuals. One process is through a direct pathway by which media encourages change by informing, modeling, motivating and guiding viewers. The other process is through a socially-mediated pathway in which media links viewers to social networks. This is significant because it connects individuals to others who participate in criminogenic behavior. The main focus of this paper is about how media generates crime. This alternative process, the socially mediated pathway, illustrates that media can be used to connect individuals who are interested in a topic. This network then facilitates the sharing of ideas and information which can be potentially harmful to society. All in all, the more a media source is perceived to be real, the greater the extent to how media will influence behavior.

Ready access to communication technologies will not necessarily enlist active participation unless people believe that they can achieve desired results by this means. Perceived personal and collective efficacy partly determines the extent to which people use this resource and the purposes to which they put it (Bandura, 2001).

In other words, not all people who interact with different media sources will feel compelled to imitate what they see, but one's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations will determine how they will use media resources. The impact of media on an individual relies on the psychological and emotional characteristics of the viewer, the setting where media is viewed, and the media content (Lambie, et al., 2013). In all, a combination of the following aspects can influence a person's behavior according to the social learning theory. The main concern is media depictions of crime today legitimize, glamorize, and trivialize violence, according to Bandura (date). Ultimately, this creates a greater social impact because those media models motivate, inform, and enable people to transform knowledge into skilled action.

Violent Behavior is a Result of Exposure to Crime

Christopher Ferguson, a psychologist, professor and co-chair of psychology at Stetson University in Florida, proposes two models for the influence of media on criminogenic behavior. To begin, Ferguson's article, *Media Violence Effects, Confirmed Truth or Just Another X-File?* is a critical review of other literature that critiques other media violence literature. Ferguson proposed what he called the "most current" theory of media effects on aggression, the General Aggression Model. This model borrows from Bandura's social modeling theory. The General Aggression Model suggests aggressive behavior occurs when aggressive cognitive scripts are activated by environmental stimuli. Moreover, repeated exposure to violent stimuli, like that found on media, provides an opportunity to form aggressive scripts that can become activated.

The more a person is exposed to violent stimuli, the more aggressive scripts that can be formed, and presented when dealing with potentially hostile environmental stimuli. Ferguson also predicted that extensive exposure to violent stimuli causes people to interpret ambiguous stimuli as hostile or harmful, causing an individual to respond more aggressively. Additionally, the author explained that the General Aggression Model modeled the Passive Modeling Theory, where repeated exposure to violent media will cause individuals to engage in violent behavior regardless of other factors like personality, family environment, genetics, or biological contributions. For this theory, motivation for violent behavior can be developed through exposure to crime media (Ferguson, 2009).

Copycat Criminogenic Behavior is Biological

In opposition to his previous claims, Christopher Ferguson also proposed that researchers should consider genetic and biological heritability in the context of media violence. In his article (2009), he mentions that genetic effects have never been included in previous models of media violence effects. Ferguson criticized that investigators fail to take these types of key variables into account. These variables may contribute to why some individuals are attracted to violent media and why they participate in such violent behaviors. In addition, the author claimed that family violence better represents the social modeling theory than the effects of media violence because it is closer in proximity to the “emotional closeness to the modeling source” (Ferguson, 2009). In his paper, Ferguson said that recent research showed that biological factors are stronger influences of violent criminal behavior than environmental factors. Overall, Ferguson does not believe that media violence is a necessary or a sufficient cause of violent behavior. He concluded his argument by expressing the need for society to move past the assumptions that media violence is capable of teaching violent criminal behavior through social modeling (Ferguson,

2009). Yet his statements are based upon analyzing another scientists' research. Throughout this article, Ferguson never conducts any research of his own. He states that research on this topic does not provide empirical, valid, or reliable data, but never proposes any empirical, valid, or reliable data of his own. This suggest that his research and expert opinion should be discounted.

Cultivation Theory

Many other scientists agree that media programs influence viewers and as the number of views for reality crime programs increases, so does crime. Yet different scientists support a different theory to explain this phenomenon. Bill Loges and Sandra Ball-Rokeach support the Cultivation Theory for the criminogenic copycat influence of media on behavior. The Cultivation Theory hypothesizes that the more time people spend "living" in the television world, the more likely those people are to believe that social reality aligns with reality portrayed on television. This theory supports the idea that media breeds criminals and crime because heavy viewers think the television world resembles the likelihood of crime and the amount of people involved in the criminal justice system. In their article, *Mass Media and Crime* (2002), Loges and Ball-Rokeach supported other researcher's explanations of psychological processes that occur during cultivation. Mares and Shrum claimed that it is easier for heavy viewers to rely on the impressions media makes on them when talking about the real world than to search their minds and make more elaborate and accurate interpretations (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 2002). Source confusion occurs when the audience is not aware of where information comes from and the tendency for people to describe real life in terms of media. It is important to note that the authors expressed that even if media viewers limited their sources to nonfiction and news programs, audiences would still end up with distorted impressions of the real world (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 2002).

Fad Theory

Another theory proposed to explain copycat criminogenic behavior is the Fad Theory. Armando Simon claimed copycat crime to be a fad. In his journal article, Application of Fad Theory to Copycat Crimes: Quantitative Data Following the Columbine Massacre (date), Simon defined a fad as an imitative behavior carried out by numerous individuals within society, typically independent of one another. After the Columbine shooting in 1999, Armando Simon studied similar crimes and discovered a pattern of predictability for copycat crimes. Simon defines the Fad Theory as fads with varying subject matter and duration that follow predictable patterns. According to the article, two types of fads exist. The first type of fad is frivolous fads, where subject matter is viewed by observers with amusement and curiosity. The second type of fads are socio-political fads, where the judicial branch is involved. The author hypothesized that frivolous fads describe similar crimes and behaviors following the Columbine Massacre. There are eight generalities of frivolous fads:

1. The initial stimulus that evokes the fad because it is somehow novel.
2. The subject matter of a fad may have been present before, but there is a change in the qualitative difference, which results in mass behavior.
3. Due to modern communication techniques, fads may cross national boundaries.
4. In different parts of the country, fads manifest differently, but sustain the main theme.
5. The fad has a distinctive name that participants continually refer to.
6. There is a latency period, a time between the initial appearance of a stimulus and when the imitative behavior begins and becomes obvious in measurable behavior.

7. The easiest way to measure the strength of a fad is by the number of times a person is cited in the mass media (newspaper/magazine articles, books, television, and the internet).
8. The intensity of a fad in the how varied the common theme is - the longer the latency period, the less variation that occurs (Simon, 2007).

Armondo Simon analyzed research and statistics before and after the Columbine Massacre. After all his research, he described the school shooting as an event that caused a socio-political fad across the United States. Simon highlighted statistics before and after the shooting at Columbine in 1999. Before the incident, statistics show that there were hardly any bomb threats or magazine articles about school violence and safety. Simon explained that before the shooting at Columbine, there were typically one to two bomb threats throughout the entire school year for the entire state. Yet, after the massacre, the number of bomb threats and articles about school violence and safety quickly skyrocketed. A few days after the event, there were 354 reported threats. Not only did news articles circulate news about the school shooting, but Internet chat rooms revealed rumors of similar massacres that were expected to occur. Seven years after the Columbine massacre, a similar school shooting took place at Virginia Tech. According to Simon, the shooter at Virginia Tech referenced the perpetrators of the Columbine shooting in writing (Simon, 2007).

Moreover, it is clear from this example, and Simon's study that media can create fads. Furthermore, "if there is no media, there is no fad, yet the fad causes abnormal media coverage" (Simon, 2007). In other words, the aftermath of the Columbine incident may have been reduced if the media had not publicized the event. The high number of reports after the event generated the increasing number of threats afterwards. Further, the author explained that society knows that

such fads will create abnormal media coverage of such events, encouraging the continuation of the fad. Armando Simon mentioned that the fad theory not only explains copycat criminogenic behavior, but imitative suicide too (Simon, 2007).

Crime Catalyst vs. Crime Trigger

In 2012, Ray Surette wanted to determine whether media content served as a crime rudder or a trigger. Crime triggers are models of crime that function as direct cause of criminality. Exposure to such crime models are thought to cause individuals to commit crimes or violence they would not normally carry out. Whereas crime rudders are models that serve as crime catalysts. Ray Surette explained that these two perspectives were competing for the explanation of copycat crime. However, after conducting a study in which Surette surveyed both male and female inmates, he concluded that media exposure does not serve a causal role, but rather as a stylistic catalyst through Hence, exposure results in shaping crime and violence that would have otherwise occurred in some other fashion (Surette, 2012).

In his article, Cause or Catalyst: The Interaction of Real World and Media Crime Models (2012), Surette discussed many of the proposed theories mentioned above. For example, Surette talked about the General Aggression Model discussed by Christopher Ferguson. Surette argues that regardless of personality, family environment, genetics, or biological contributions like Ferguson argues, exposure to violence increases aggressive behavior. Therefore, removal of aggressive media (the trigger) would reduce the amount of violent behavior observed in viewers. He also mentioned the Social Learning Theory and its focus on the impact of real world crime models. For instance, delinquent peers and criminogenic family members are strong predictors of juvenile delinquency. Yet, some scientists proposed that “there must be the presence of both social environmental variables that interact with a psychological predisposition to aggression for

the relationship between exposure and aggression to appear” (Surette, 2012). Simply, both real world and media based crime models are significant in predicting behavior. In his report, Surette said that media based crime models have not been generally accepted, especially in the court system, due to heavy criticism and lack of research. Previous surveys support the idea that media has been credited as a source for crime techniques, but not as a source of criminal motivation (Surette, 2012).

Ray Surette (2012) suggested that there is value in copycat crime research. First, he claimed media criminogenic influence largely affects pre-existing criminal populations. Surette explained that copycat crimes are common in offender populations. Secondly, research in this area is also important for public policy. If exposure to media is determined to be a direct cause of crime, more sensible policies should become focused on controlling content and accessibility. On the other hand, if media acts as a catalyst for crime, then the focus should shift to reducing the likelihood of offending at risk individuals rather than media content. In 2012, Ray Surette conducted a survey to determine whether media models acted as crime triggers or rudders. At the end of the study, Surette concluded media content acts as a catalyst, or rudder, for crime. From his surveys, he also concluded that media crime models are used as a set of instructions. For more details about this study, refer to the studies section.

Stimulation Effect Hypothesis

Three years later in 2015, Ray Surette wrote a book called, *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice: Images, Realities, and Policies*. In this book, Ray Surette simplified the different ways in which media impacts crime, criminality, criminal justice policy, the court system, corrections, and society. To begin, Surette said that media is amongst the most powerful sources of information that provides people with actual experience sensations. “Monkey see, monkey do”,

Surette summarized. In his book, Surette discussed multiple hypotheses for why people might imitate what they observe through media. He first introduced readers to the Stimulation Effect Hypothesis, where he believed that violent behaviors are inspired by media. Surette also proposed the Cathartic Effect Hypothesis, where exposure to violent media material acts as a therapeutic release. In other words, watching violent media relieves tension for some viewers and is satisfying. Either way, Surette explained that both hypotheses assist criminals with crime techniques. Ray Surette claimed that because criminogenic behaviors are portrayed through media, crime and criminal behavior have become socially acceptable. Additionally, Surette suggested that the Stimulation Effect and Cathartic Effect Hypotheses cause viewers to be more violent. The more inspired or the greater the release from watching violent media, the more that viewer looks for and identifies with similar media content. This, in return, generates more violent or aggressive behaviors (Surette, 2015).

In his books, Ray Surette talked about two models as well. The first model he discussed was the Primary Cause Model. Here, Surette insisted that there is a direct linear relationship between media content and consumer behavior. The more media content consumed by an individual, the more the consumer's behaviors align with the content being viewed. The second model Surette warranted is the Negligible Crime Model. This model assumes media affects individuals who are predisposed to seek particular types of criminogenic media. These predisposed individuals display similar behaviors as those portrayed through media mediums. Surette used the Negligible Crime Model to explain why terrorism is the most generated copycat crime today. He wrote that terrorists understand the importance of media and manipulate it to their advantage. They use media to attract predisposed individuals who are seeking extremely savage media content. By viewing such content, viewers begin to mimic terrorist behaviors and

identify more with terrorists and terrorist organizations. Hence, media content and coverage of terrorist acts encourage copycats (Surette, 2015).

Overall, the main purpose of Surette's book, *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice: Images, Realities, and Policies*, is to bring into light the issue of the media's effect on crime. More specifically, Surette's main concern in this book is to highlight the media's ability to motivate and promote the spread of terrorism. Surette proposed several models and hypotheses that may explain such effects of media consumers. As mentioned in previous articles, the idea that media influences crime and criminogenic behaviors is not widely accepted by court systems. Some judges and scientists believe there are more reasonable explanations as to what causes criminogenic behavior, like environment. But Ray Surette emphasizes the importance of the need for more research on the topic of media influences on behavior because, as mentioned earlier, terrorism has become one of the most significant media generated copycat crimes. He argued and urged the need for strong intervention in the creation, content, and distribution of media (Surette, 2015).

Part Two: Examples Of Media Generated Copycat Crime

Many people, like Christopher Ferguson, deny that media has the capability to influence audiences and generate copycat crimes. He and other skeptics believe other factors are the cause for individual's criminogenic behavior. Yet there are many real-life situations in which people said they were inspired by media content or that they used media content as a crime tool. One of the earliest examples of media influencing criminogenic behavior is depicted in the suspicious death of Carol Hellar in *Forensic Files: The Big Chill*. In this television series, experts prove there is no such thing as a perfect crime. From the initial beginning of an investigation until the end where a legal resolution is established, forensic scientists assemble crime scene pieces every

criminal leaves behind during each episode. The producers demonstrate crime re-creations, and oftentimes disprove alternate versions of the crime with scientific explanations. *The Big Chill* goes into detail about how Carol Hellar's husband, Dennis Hellar, slowly poisoned her with ethylene glycol, or antifreeze.

Ms. Hellar had a long history with manic depression, also referred to as bipolar disorder. After getting divorced from her first husband, Ms. Hellar moved to Perry, Oklahoma. Not long after moving, she met and married Dennis Hellar in 1994. Shortly after getting married, Carol Hellar became ill. Her symptoms were so severe that she died in June 1995 at the age of 53. Prior to 1994, Carol Hellar was diagnosed with manic depression/ bipolar disorder and was taking medications containing lithium. As her symptoms of dehydration, mental confusion, kidney dysfunction, and chronic metabolic acidosis grew worse, doctors believed it was Carol's prescribed medications causing her symptoms because all the symptoms she experienced were consistent with the known side effects of lithium, except for kidney failure. Even as doctors lowered the doses of her medications, her symptoms persisted. Finally, in June of 2015, after being flown into a local emergency room, one doctor decided to run a drug test and discovered Carol Hellar's blood contained 6mg/dL of ethylene glycol. But by that time, it was too late to reverse the poisoning. Carol Hellar was pronounced dead and an autopsy report confirmed the cause of death as ethylene glycol poisoning. It was up to investigators now to determine whether Carol Hellar's death was a suicide or a homicide.

Throughout the episode, the voiceover describes peculiar behaviors that Dennis Hellar demonstrated during the time of his wife's illness. During an interview with Carol's sister, she said that Dennis randomly brought up information that he believed his wife was poisoning herself. She said that Dennis told her that he found a bottle of antifreeze in the kitchen pantry

that was missing some of its contents. Mr. Hellar told Carol's sister that he thought Carol was drinking the antifreeze. Carol's sister explained that his statement was odd because it came out of nowhere. She knew her sister had mental health problems, but knew she was not depressed enough to kill herself. Other witnesses revealed that Denis Hellar had told people "a teaspoon of antifreeze a day can kill someone in a week." Friends of Carol's also described her husband falling asleep during her funeral and showing no remorse. Towards the end of the investigation, Mr. Hellar admitted to poisoning his wife through a hidden police microphone on his new girlfriend's clothing. Eventually, he told investigators how he covered up the smell and color of the antifreeze so that his wife would not know, although the voiceover explained that they could not reveal this information on this episode.

Afterwards, forensic scientists discussed how they went about determining if Carol Hellar's death was a suicide or a homicide. The article, *Was Woman Slowly Poisoned - Sip by Sip?* (1997), explained how a toxicologist concluded that Carol did not commit suicide because she experienced a long, drawn out poisoning. The toxicologist admitted that if someone wanted to commit suicide, they would not go through the long, excruciating process that Carol Hellar experienced. The toxicologist stated that Ms. Hellar's murder was planned. In November of 2016, this episode had 113, 565 views on YouTube alone. This number does not include how many people viewed the episode when it aired on television or other sources in which this show can be accessed. Additionally, there are two newspaper articles about this case. With that said, the number of people who have access to information from this case dramatically increased.

This case is significant to the claim that media acts as a tool to influence criminogenic behavior because for one, Dennis Hellar announced how his research of one teaspoon of antifreeze a day would kill somebody in a week. Secondly, experts provided information about

how they discovered there was no possible way this could be declared as a suicide. They admitted that if this was a suicide case, Carol Hellar would have drank enough ethylene glycol to have died right away, rather than dragging out a slow, painful death. Third, the video and articles portrayed that medications containing lithium could imitate the same symptoms as ethylene glycol poisoning. Fourth, the media content pointed out that there was a way to cover up the smell and color of antifreeze in food. This information could tempt viewers to look up such information, an example of how media acts as a tool for crime.

Moreover, the media sources pertaining to this case alone are examples of various mediums that provide information that may influence copycat behavior. On Google, when typing in “woman slowly poisoned by husband,” dozens of other cases come up that demonstrate similar stories and similar methods. “News has to be of interest to somebody,” Andrew Arno claims in his book, *Alarming Reports: Communicating Conflict in Daily News* (2009). What is more frightening is the ability to access information now in the digital age, and the number of possible people who have used these resources as crime tools.

In the book, *Alarming Reports*, Andrew Arno’s main point discussed how media has enabled terrorists to record and publish sermons on the internet and how their messages can be accessed by anyone. Throughout his book, Arno gave several examples of how media has influenced criminogenic behaviors. One example he discussed in his book is how recorded sermons from a bookstore may have inspired 9/11 suicide pilots. The *New York Times* wrote an article about this occurrence called, “Imam at German Mosque Preached Hate to 9/11 Pilots” (Arno, 2009). Mr. Fazazi, an imam, called upon followers to “fight the Americans as long as they keep Muslims in prison.” Such statements were recorded on videotapes that were later seized by Hamburg state police during a bookstore raid near the mosque. The videotapes were

made to create conflict by enticing listeners. The goal of Mr. Fazazi was to spread his message to as many people as possible by making his sermons widely available by use of videotaping. Anyone who went into that bookstore was able to purchase those videos to access the contents. By sharing the video with others, this could further the spread of the terrorist organizations. Without access to the video content, the 9/11 suicide pilots may not have been encouraged or motivated to carry out such actions. In addition, information about this case was described in the *New York Times* article. Hence, the article may have attracted other people to be interested in such activities (Arno, 2009).

“A large body of material detailing how to commit specific crimes is readily available in films, on television, from the internet, and in printed form” (Surette, 2015). In his book, *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice*, Surette provides another example of media that was specifically created to generate crime. In 1885, an individual named Johann had made “how to terrorism” manuals. In the manuals, Johann wrote instructions on how to make nitroglycerin, dynamite, inflammable liquids, and poisons. In the manual, the author advocated that people reading his manuscripts use those products in antigovernment bombings and attacks. Afterwards, Ray Surette concluded that Johann’s manuals were thought to have been used as a reference during the 1886 Chicago Haymarket Square bombing, in which a bomb was thrown towards a squad of policemen trying to break up a demonstration (Haymarket Square Riot). A second example he also talks about are increased bomb threats directed at nuclear facilities after news coverage on nuclear power issues. Third, the attempted assassination of President Regan by John Hinckley was believed to be caused by media priming. As mentioned earlier, priming occurs when existing ideas or concepts are activated when viewing media. These three examples in this one book alone support the ideas that people create crime content in various mediums, look for resources

that provide crime content, and are encouraged, motivated, and influenced by information provided from media resources (Surette, 2015).

In the article, “Inflaming Your Neighbors”: Copycat Firesetting in Adolescence (2013), authors Lambie, Randel, and McDowell proposed that there was evidence of school shootings taking place after highly publicized school shootings in the media. As mentioned before when talking about the fad theory, Armando Simon discusses how shooters involved in the Virginia Tech shooting referenced the Columbine massacre during the event. Similarly, another case had occurred at Heritage High School in Rockdale County, Georgia. Here, a student had fired twelve shots in his school. After the event, peers said the student was copying the infamous Columbine High School shooting. Students revealed the offender had made comments like “should I do something like that” and “it should have happened at this school a long time ago.” When questioned by police, the student had explained “I had just gotten the idea from the Columbine High School shooting on April 20... I decided to open fire May 20, one month after the Colorado shooting” (Lambie, et al., 2013).

Another example of how media has influenced people to commit crimes is the case in which the film, *Manchester By the Sea*, inspired a couple to murder their son. According to the report, *Prosecutor: 'Manchester by the Sea' Inspired Duo to Kill Son*, after watching the film, a couple from Norwich, New York said they were inspired to murder their sixteen-year-old disabled adopted son. The couple planned to cover up their son’s death by staging it to look like an accident during a house fire, like that seen in the movie. “Manchester by the Sea,” an Academy Award winning film, is a story about a man who accidentally starts a house fire that kills his children. In the film, the main character is not prosecuted. Chenango County District Attorney Joseph McBride noted that the message of the film was that you cannot be prosecuted

for accidentally killing your children. McBride noticed at the bail hearing that their son suspiciously died, two hours after watching the film. An autopsy revealed that the boy died prior to the house fire but the cause of death had not yet been determined. Forensic scientists determined that the boy was murdered before the fire, and that the couple was most likely influenced by the film to make their son's death look like an accident because of the message portrayed in the film. Not only was this case shared through this television broadcast, but there was also an article about it in *Time* magazine. There are multiple types of mediums where information about this case can be accessed. More importantly, both sources bring attention to the message portrayed in the film; you cannot be punished for accidentally killing your children. This couple was inspired and given the tools for criminogenic behavior from this film. It is possible that the film, as well as news articles, television broadcasts and other sources about this case may have inspired other individuals to do the same (*Prosecutor: 'Manchester by the Sea' Inspired Duo to Kill Son, 2017*).

A more recent example that emphasizes the importance of this issue is a case study done by Raai, et al. (2017). In the paper, *Copycat Violence in Psychiatric Patients*, presented at the 69th Annual Scientific Meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, in New Orleans, LA, psychologists presented the audience with a case where they experienced firsthand a "copycat effect." A patient admitted himself into a psychiatric facility because he felt an urge to rape and kill and had acted on this urge. He admitted to being obsessed with the television show "Dexter," had studied other movies, and spent time on social media and other websites such as Facebook and Google where he says he got most of his ideas from. The psychologist gave the patient a PCL, a type of psychopathic exam, where he determined that the patient was not a psychopath based on the results. For a while, the psychologists assigned kept the patient in

a short-term psychiatric facility where the patient engaged in therapy sessions. Eventually the patient said the urges were getting worse, so psychologists moved the patient to a long-term psychiatric facility to develop coping mechanisms. Within the first couple of nights of being in the new facility, the patient murdered another victim. The next day when he was asked why he killed the other man, the patient responded that he was bored and had recalled an episode of “Dexter” where the main character killed another guy using the same method as the patient did the night before. When looking deeper into copycat violence, the psychologist involved in this case discovered 10,000 rapes, murders, and assaults occur every year (American Psychology Association) and according to the reports, they are influenced by media. Given these points, they also did research on the effects of “Dexter” and discovered other cases where patients said they had gotten their ideas/techniques from this television show. Once again, this example highlights the obvious issue that media influences and inspires individuals to act criminally.

Other copycat crimes include a nine-year-old girl in California who was raped by several girls following the release of a movie. In the movie, a young woman was raped in a similar fashion in a juvenile reformatory. A woman in Boston who was doused with gasoline and set on fire similar to that depicted in some film where teenage boys roamed Boston burning tramps for fun and amusement. A man poured gasoline on his wife to frighten her after watching a movie where a battered wife poured gasoline on her husband in his sleep and set him ablaze. Airlines reported an increased number of extortion calls where people made bomb threats following the release of *Doomsday Flight*. Copycats have tampered with Extra- Strength Tylenol to imitate the murders in which Tylenol was laced with cyanide. The attempted assassination of President Ronald Regan was apparently a copycat crime as John Hinckley Jr. was trying to emulate a character from the movie, *Taxi Driver*. Finally, the suspect of the Oklahoma City Federal

Building bombing, Timothy McVeigh told investigators he was inspired by the film *Red Dawn* (Surette, 2015). In Surette's book *Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice*, he writes two full pages of copycat crime examples in addition to the ones listed above.

Like Bandura said, not all people will be compelled to imitate criminogenic behaviors seen in media, but one cannot say that this issue is irrelevant (Bandura, 2001) People have admitted to using media as a crime tool and being inspired and motivated by information or ideas transferred through various media sources. As mentioned previously, terrorist organizations have learned to utilize different forms of media to spread their messages to more people. This social problem is an important issue that needs to be resolved.

Part Three: Studies Conducted on Prevalence of Copycat Crime.

Beside real-life examples of people who have admitted to using media as a crime tool, multiple scientists have conducted research studies to reflect the impact of media on criminogenic behavior. In combination with anecdotal cases, research has shown that copycat crimes do occur, but the rate at which they occur is unknown. Over the years, researchers have created various studies to explore the effect of media on copycat crimes.

According to the authors of *Copycat Crime Dynamics: The Interplay of Empathy, Narrative Persuasion and Risk with Likelihood to Commit Future Criminality* (2015), research on the correlation between media and violence demonstrated that youths with low empathy and high sensitivity to narrative persuasion are at risk of criminogenic behavior. Based on these two factors, the motivation to copy behaviors and risk of criminality predict the likelihood to commit future criminality (LCFC). The purpose of this study was to analyze the role of empathy, narrative persuasion, risk, media influence, need for cognition (NFC), copycat motivation, and

the LCFC. Scientists sampled 373 males from three different categories in Trinidad; they conducted face-to-face interviews with juveniles from state detention centers, non-prestige secondary schools in high crime areas (high risk schools), and prestige secondary schools in low crime areas (low risk schools). Using the Structural Equation Model (SEM), the risk of copycat motivation has the strongest positive direct relationship with LCFC. Also, researchers discovered empathetic concerns and narrative persuasion are inversely and positively related in respect to copycat motivation. To begin, Chadee, et al. (2015) established that media is a significant factor in the generation of suicide and terrorism as demonstrated by prior empirical research. The two psychological factors these authors are interested in are empathy and narrative persuasion because both have been speculated to be linked to copycat crime and generate the most public concern. The first question the scientists examined was what the role of empathy was in imitative behavior? The authors defined empathy as the ability to project oneself in the role of another person and the ability to imitate and see the world as someone else does. The researchers hypothesized that low empathy will result in more aggression and therefore more criminality. Therefore, more empathy will result in more imitation and media constructs will act more as criminal models. The type of empathy that an individual demonstrates will depend on the environment and their character identification. As mentioned previously, the first goal of this study is to empirically examine the relationship of empathy levels to copycat crime while delineating other effects. The second question the researchers set out to answer was what the role of narrative persuasion is in imitative crime. Narrative persuasion is defined as a media source that entertains and educates to increase the audience's knowledge about an issue and creates favorable attitudes. Furthermore, the absorption/transformation causes the consumer to be transported to a world in which criminal behavior is justified and rewarded. Hence, the authors

hypothesized that as narrative persuasion increases, so will the likelihood of copycat crime. Furthermore, the second goal of the study was to examine the interaction of narrative persuasion levels with copycat crime as well as other correlates. Additionally, the authors express that the need for cognition, NFC, has been observed as a determinant for how individuals interact with media content. (2015)

Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), individuals can understand the effects of NFC on copycat crime and distinguish between systematic and heuristic processing of media supplied information. High NFCs are predicted to reduce crime while low NFCs are thought to increase copycat crime propensity. The authors also link the “third person effect” to copycat crime propensity. In other words, individuals who perceive the media as criminogenically influential over others tends to be influenced themselves. As mentioned previously, the researchers conducted surveys within the three groups studied. They measured empathy, narrative persuasion, LCFC, copycat motivation, risk of criminality, NFC, TV realism, character identification, and media influence on criminal behavior of others. For each measure, a specific scale was used. For instance, to measure empathy, the authors used the Interpersonal Reactivity Index. To measure narrative persuasion, the researchers referred to Green and Brock’s Transportation Scale. Overall, the study concluded preexisting motivation to commit copycat crimes displayed the strongest positive direct relationship with LCFC. Risk had the second highest positive relationship. Character identification also illustrated a positive correlation with copycat motivation. At the same time, empathy and narrative persuasion showed inverse, but positive relationships with copycat motivation. To conclude, the authors of this study say that their findings are consistent with other research on this topic. In all, the researchers believe that

the media's role is an instructional catalyst rather than a motivational genesis on copycat behavior (Chadee, et al., 2015).

Lambie, et al., authors of "Inflaming Your Neighbors": Copycat Firesetting in Adolescence (2013), considered and discussed existing theories and research concerning the issue of copycat behaviors and how it was applicable to the population of children and adolescent fire-setters. The authors hypothesized that children and adolescents may be especially vulnerable to the copycat effect for reasons including consumption of violent, aggressive media, desensitization, observational learning, priming, alteration of scripts, and environmental factors. Based on the results of their study, Lambie, et al. (2013) urge that there be consideration for the potential role of media in copycat behaviors and improve how media report events.

Lambie, et al. cite multiple reports of copycat crime events in their article, "Inflaming Your Neighbors": Copycat Firesetting in Adolescence (2013). The first case study the authors talk about is in Los Angeles during the 2011, where cars were set on fire three days before New Year's Day. The two suspects believed to be in connection with the fires were detained, yet new fires continued. According to media coverage, it was suggested that multiple arsonists were involved, many of them likely to have been copycats. A year later, during the 2012/2013 New Year's celebration, more than a thousand cars were set ablaze. This series of events became known as the New Year's tradition in France. In the French parliament, it was of great debate whether or not to publicize the information about the fires because they believed if they did so, it would inspire more copycat arsonists. Therefore, the New Year's car arson statistics were withheld from the public because of speculation that youths in rival areas of France would compete to see who could cause the most damage. Interestingly, after withholding such information, there was a decrease in the number of cars burned that year.

A second case study occurred in Coatesville, Pennsylvania where several fires were lit between 2008 and 2009. This series of fires caused three million dollars' worth of damages. Many people were arrested in connection to the fires, but in one particular case, a nineteen year-old boy was investigated. A search of the boy's house by local police found a newspaper article about a series of arsons occurring in the same area. Finding this evidence led investigators to believe that the teenager had imitated the actions described in the news article. Therefore, this information suggests that a copycat element was likely involved in the suspect's fire-setting.

The third case study was in 2008 where fires were set in Ugandan schools. During these fires, many school children were killed. Within four months, thirty-four school fires were recorded. After an investigation, psychologists thought the fires were a result of a copycat phenomenon influenced by events in the media.

One last case study in the article occurred in New Zealand in 2012. A teenager was sentenced for pouring petrol on a peer and setting him on fire. While the victim was on fire, others held the victim down for a period of time which led the victim to suffer burns on his back, shoulders, and face. The group of teenagers were approximately sixteen years of age. In court, the offender's lawyer pleaded that the incident was a joke influenced by the Jackass movies. Jackass is a series of films where people perform dangerous stunts and pranks. Unlike other cases in which inspiration came from traditional media, in this case, the source of information came from a youth film/television series.

From the case studies discussed in this article, one can see that societies all over the world are experiencing criminogenic media effects. As a result of the digital age, individuals can access information from anywhere in the world, making media crime tools available to anyone at any time. Some scientists argue that media does not influence criminal behaviors, yet from this

one article alone, five case studies proved otherwise. Further, this article demonstrated that copycat phenomenon is widespread, occurring in France, Uganda, New Zealand, and the United States (Lambie, et al. 2013).

Besides analyzing case studies, Lambie, et al. also provided some statistics from research that had been conducted on copycat crime. The authors cite Ray Surette's 2002 study in which he found twenty to forty percent of offender populations engage in copycat crimes. The authors also cite a study conducted by G. Hendrick in 1977 where ninety percent of inmates surveyed (out of two hundred and eight) reported learning new ideas, taking notes, and increasing their criminal skill by watching television violence. Another forty percent of those surveyed admitted to attempting copycat crimes as a result of viewing television. Also noted in this article is a survey done by Ray Surette in 2002 in which he discovered within a population of serious and violent juvenile offenders, one third considered copying a crime and one quarter attempted to commit a copycat crime. Moreover, the authors suggest qualitative and quantitative studies that support the idea that consumption of media endorses the copycat effect (Surette, 2002)

In 2002, Ray Surette wrote about the effects of mass media on juveniles in, *Self-Reported Copycat Crime Among a Population of Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders*. In the article, Surette highlights emerging problems with serious and violent juvenile offenders. Surette began by claiming there is a relationship between youth crime and mass media, and that media generated copycat crime has been on the rise since the emergence of mass media entertainment during the early nineteenth century. Regularly reported in the news are anecdotal reports of copycat crimes committed by teenagers. Examples include a group of kids in Texas who said they got hyped from rappers Easy E and N.W.A. after being convicted for several robberies; a group of youths who claimed they were motivated to shoot two Las Vegas police officers after

listening to Ice-T's rap song "Cop Killers"; two youths who admitted to using the film *Menace to Society* as a script for robbing and killing a motorist; *Menace to Society* motivated four other boys to steal a car, wound a man, and kill another individual; a sixteen year old Californian boy who got the idea to kill his mother from the movie *Scream*; and a Kentucky high school student who copied a scene from the film *Basketball Diaries*, killing three and wounding five classmates.

The purpose of Surette's 2002 study on SVJOs (serious and violent juvenile offenders), was to measure the prevalence of self-reported copycat crimes in this specific population and analyze the correlates of self-reported criminal behaviors. Self-reported copycat crime was measured by surveying juvenile inmates. The survey asked individuals a series of questions including:

1. Thinking of the media as including television and radio shows, movies, videos, music, books, magazines, and newspapers, can you recall ever have seen, read, or heard about a crime in the media and thought about trying the same crime?
2. Can you recall ever having tried to commit the same crime that you had seen, read, or heard about in the media?
3. Have you ever watched a movie or television show or heard a song and afterwards gone out looking to get into a fight?
4. Have you ever wanted a gun after seeing a gun used in a television program or movie?
5. Have you ever wanted a gun after hearing about guns in music? (Surette, 2002).

To explore the criminogenic role of media within the juvenile population, Ray Surette asks two questions: first, how common is self-reported copycat behavior among a group of incarcerated SVJOs? Second, what are the correlates of self-reported copycat behavior? Participants consisted of all male SVJOs processed in the Orange County Florida jail during an eight-month period in

1998. Overall, sixty-eight males between the ages of fifteen and seventeen voluntarily participated in the study. The initial survey took about an hour to complete and was administered by graduate research assistants. Prior to the survey, the researchers had explained the study would have no effect on their court cases, jail programs, or jail activities. The respondents were also advised that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to respond to. Answers for the survey included yes, no, or unsure. After the surveys were completed, they were checked for validity by checking response patterns and correlations. A second survey was administered and asked how respondents perceived reasons about why other juveniles commit crimes, why the participant felt they ended up in trouble with the law, demographics, how different resources are helpful for ideas about how to commit a crime, their attitudes about crime, society, and media, and a self- report of copycat crime measures, media consumption, and preferences (Surette, 2002).

In addition, other non-self-reported variables were taken into consideration. From each SVJO's correctional record, researchers recorded race, age, school grades, and each juvenile's grade performance levels for reading, math, and verbal skills. Researchers also considered everyone's criminal history and their adjustment to jail regulations. Finally, SVJOs were also surveyed about how much media they consume. More specifically, they were asked how many hours of television do they watch a day, how many hours of music do they typically listen to, how many movies they watch per year, and how many books (not including school books or comic books) they read yearly. From the study, results revealed about one in every three juveniles reported to have considered copying a crime, and one in every four attempted copying a crime. Additionally, one in every five participants reported having been encouraged by the media to seek fights. Ray Surette explains that these statistics closely resemble results from

similar studies conducted on adult offenders by Heller and Polsky (1976), Hendrick (1977), and Pease and Love (1984). All in all, Ray Surette found juveniles admit to finding media useful because it contains helpful information and are more likely to commit copycat crimes. Juveniles who report media as criminologically influential are more likely to commit a copycat crime. From the report, one can observe a correlation between media and juvenile criminality (Surette, 2002).

Ten years later in 2012, Ray Surette published another article titled, Cause or Catalyst: The Interaction of Real World and Media Crime Models. In this article, Surette described a new study to determine whether the effect of media exposure functions as a crime trigger or a crime rudder. As defined earlier, a crime trigger functions as a direct cause of criminality. Exposure to crime models cause individuals to commit crimes or behave violently regardless of their personality. Hence, removing exposure to the media content would reduce the number of criminal acts. Meanwhile, a crime rudder serves as crime forming catalyst. In other words, criminally disposed individuals with pre-existing motives to perform a crime use media as crime instructions or exposure shapes the crime that would have occurred regardless. In this article, Surette recalls Christopher Ferguson's article that media may act as a stylistic catalyst where the crime would still be committed, but not necessarily copycat crimes. In this study, Surette examined the comparative roles of real world and media provided crime models. The purpose of this study was to emphasize the association between exposure to media crime models and criminal behavior.

In this study, 574 county jail inmates were surveyed about past copycat crime behavior and media interactions. The sample consisted of male and female inmates from a southern county jail facility. The sample also consisted of general population inmates, those in drug and

alcohol treatment, GED and general education, religion based programs, a sample of trustees, inmate institutional workers, and release inmates. High risk inmates were not included in this study. According to the article, fifteen percent of participating inmates were Hispanic and the rest of the sample was equally distributed between white and African-Americans. One third of inmates were younger than twenty-seven. More than one fourth of participating inmates were female. Only eight percent of inmates were experiencing their first arrest. One third had been incarcerated at a juvenile detention facility. One third had a father who served jail time and half had a brother who served time in jail. Furthermore, seven out of ten inmates had a relative who had been incarcerated. This information was significant to the study because the goal of the study was to observe the roles and interactions between real world and media provided crime models (Surette, 2012).

In each dormitory, the study was introduced by a faculty researcher and was accompanied by a correction officer. Participants were made aware it was an anonymous study and that researchers were interested in studying perceptions on sentencing and media issues. It was made clear that the study was being conducted separately from the jail and jail programs. Therefore, their responses would have no impact on case processing, jail conditions, or existing jail programs. Researchers clarified the meaning of copycat behavior as behaviors or ideas taken from media. Media was defined to include television, films, music, music videos, videogames, the internet, radio, newspapers, books, and magazines.

A self-reported history of copycat behavior was collected from participants to identify copycat offenders from non-copycat offenders. Ray Surette claims that self-reported crime measures are supported by previous research. Surette says the forced choice answers of yes or no are reliable by differentiating true copycat offenders from non- copycat offenders. Whereas short

answer responses leave room for different interpretations. When asked “have you ever tried to copy a crime you saw in media content?” Surette believes yes or no only responses are better for research purposes. For this experiment, participants were asked about lifetime experiences. Very similar to the last study conducted by Ray Surette in 2002, he measured past copycat behavior on an index of five indicators:

- 1) Had the respondent ever looked for a fight after media use?
- 2) Had they ever wanted a gun after watching television or a movie?
- 3) Had they ever wanted a gun after listening to music?
- 4) Had they ever considered committing a crime based on media content?
- 5) Had they have ever attempted a crime based on observed media content?

For each question, the participant was awarded one point for each behavior. The score therefore ranged between zero and five. In the end, most inmates had said no to the five indicators. One third revealed moderate copycat behaviors and one in twenty reported high copycat activity levels based on the indicators. Table 1 illustrates the results of Surette’s research.

Indicator	Result from Self- Reported History
Had respondent ever looked for a fight after media use?	One in six responded yes.
Wanted a gun after watching television or a movie?	One in four said yes.
Wanted a gun after listening to music?	
Ever considered committing a crime based on media content?	28% reported considered copying a crime.
Ever attempted a crime based on observed media content?	22% have attempted a copycat crime.

Table 1 (Surette, 2012)

In all, when asked, a portion of the population that was surveyed admit they have been influenced by media. After watching or listening to media content, participants have looked for fights, considered, or even attempted a crime after observing it through media.

To interpret the role of media crime models, researchers also collected information from inmates regarding media consumption and attraction to media crime models. Therefore, participants were questioned about the number of daily hours spent with varying forms of media like television, music, internet, video games, books, and movies. By measuring the amount of time spent on media platforms, scientists can estimate the risk of exposure to crime content based on the idea that more hours of consumption yield more exposure opportunities to crime models. Table 2 demonstrates the preferred media platforms of inmates surveyed:

Platform	Percentage of Inmates Preferring the Platform
Films & TV	30.70%
Music	19.50%
Videogames	9.30%
Print	7.20%
Internet	7.20%
No Favorite	25.80%

Table 2 (Surette, 2012)

Overall, films and television were the most popular media platforms used by inmates, followed by music and videogames. Roughly twenty-six percent said they did not have a preferred media platform.

Next, participants were asked about their interest in media criminogenic content. Interest was measured using a scale from one (low interest) to four (great interest). The survey asked inmates to rate their interest on items like, “I enjoy seeing people get away with crimes on

media, I enjoy seeing fist fight or gun battle in the media, and I like to learn about how crimes are committed” (Surette, 2012). The average score for this measure was 2.09 illustrating that perspectives of interest in criminogenic media is split. Lastly, one final measure researchers used to measure the impact of the media crime model was to explore an inmate’s perception of media as a source of information about crime and how-to crime instructions. Questions enquired as to what media platforms would be the most helpful for ideas about how to commit a crime. Examples of platforms included music videos, newspapers, movies, television, books, magazines, and videogames. Again, the response to each question included a range from one (media was not that helpful) to four (media was highly helpful). The average for this score was 2.49, emphasizing an even distribution of values (Surette, 2012). The main take away here is that some participants admit that they are either interested in criminogenic media and find media to be a useful tool or not.

Overall, Ray Surette concluded from this study that the more available real crime models were, the more likely the inmate was to report past copycat behavior. Meanwhile, interpretations about media consumption was mixed. Old media, such as television, music, and movies were said to not cause copycat crime. This study also found that the more individuals read, the less likely they were to report copycat behaviors. However, new interactive media, for example, internet and electronic games, were seen to be positively correlated to copycat crimes. All in all, from this study, Surette suggested that younger male inmates that were exposed to real world crime models, did not read a lot, spent more time on the internet and played videogames perceived the media as a good source for information about crime. Furthermore, Surette concluded that the best predictor of past copycat behavior could be indicated by analyzing the responses to how helpful media is. He also supported the idea that there is a powerful generating

source for copycat behavior from the interaction between real world and media crime models. Based on his findings, Ray Surette finds that media primarily acts as a rudder, or catalyst for crime. In conclusion, pre-inclined individuals exposed to real world crime models purposely seek out media crime models to extract instructions on how to commit a crime (Surette, 2012).

A year later, Ray Surette composed an article that responded to Christopher Ferguson's paper, *Media Violent Effects: Confirmed or Just Another X-File?* (2013). In Surette's article, *Estimating the Prevalence of Copycat Crime: A Research Note* (2013), the author analyzed several studies that investigated the prevalence of copycat crime, much like Ferguson's article. Contrary to Ferguson's article, Ray Surette argued that statistical data on this topic thus far was valid based on his examination of the studies. Surette asserted that previous research does not display biases as Ferguson claimed, and the data collected from research was statistically significant. For Surette's study, the focus of the research was how often copycat crimes are reported in the media. Surette analyzed studies that had been previously conducted on the influences of media on copycat crime. For the studies he examined, participants were asked questions such as, "have you ever gotten an idea from the media to copy a crime?". The only answers to the questions asked were yes, no, or unsure. Surette admitted that this study was not as exhaustive as the meta-analysis methodology normally required, yet he explained that he hoped this work would encourage full meta-analysis examinations. Qualified studies were found and used by searching academic search engines for articles that addressed such topics as copycat crime, copycat imitation, texts about crime and media, and interviews researchers working on the topic. In all, ten studies were analyzed. Each study consisted of subjects from various populations. Each of the studies analyzed measured crime models through self-reports.

As mentioned in the beginning, there are researchers opposed to the media crime model influences on criminogenic behavior. Christopher Ferguson, author of *Media Violence Effects: Confirmed Truth or Just Another X- File?* (2009) criticized existing literature about media violence and its effects on criminal behavior. According to Ferguson's research, he said that the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported a decline in the number of violent crimes committed. Hence, as technology has improved, the FBI reports that as a whole, crime rates have gone down, suggesting that media does not cause crime. Ferguson also discussed ambiguity about the "standardized" measuring tools for aggression. "Discussion of the validity of a measure of any construct can occur only once its reliability has been established, and the reliability of a measure can be established only if the measure is standardized" (Ferguson, 2009). In other words, Ferguson mocks researchers that believe the measurement of aggression and violence can be standardized. Ferguson says that measures of aggression varies between administration and in scoring measures. Therefore, Ferguson claims it is difficult to obtain a reliable, standardized measure for the prevalence of copycat criminogenic behavior because of media.

By reviewing about two hundred empirical studies about media violence effects, Ferguson concluded that research studies failed to support the link between media and copycat behaviors. He claimed that the research is very inconsistent because of multiple dependent variables like personality, violence within the family, biology, and genetics. He talks about the researchers lack for the Bonferoni correction. In statistics, the Bonferroni correction is a method used to counteract the problem of multiple comparisons. According to the author, the experiments that did not use this correction in their analysis of data are invalid. All in all, the author pointed out the failure of investigators to consider key variables that would explain why people behave violently and are attracted to violent media. "Media violence is neither a

necessary nor sufficient cause of violent behavior” (Ferguson, 2009). The author made his claims based on reading and reviewing the work of other scientists and researchers. Never does Ferguson conduct his own study to measure the effects of media on criminogenic copycat behavior. Without conducting some sort of research, how could the author support his claims to disprove previous empirical research? Ferguson relied heavily on research presented by others. Throughout his entire article, he points out all the flaws of studies that examine the relationship between media and copycat crime.

After examining each study that Ferguson had criticized, Surette revealed the prevalence values for each individual study. In addition, he confirmed a 95% confidence interval for each individual study. According to Surette, significant Q values suggest that the populations who were surveyed were not homogeneous as Ferguson claimed. In this analysis, Surette concluded that publication bias was not found either. He discussed two assessments that were conducted in order to examine the presence of publication bias. Based on the results of the assessments, Surette confirmed that the null hypotheses remain rejected. More specifically, Surette rejected Ferguson’s hypothesis that the prevalence of copycat crime is near zero (Surette, 2013).

By analyzing multiple research studies, Surette indicated that approximately one in every four at-risk individuals engage in copycat crime (Surette, 2013). Besides demonstrating an estimate for the occurrence of copycat crime, Surette concluded that this study revealed the need for a full meta-analysis study on copycat crime prevalence. Surette also urged that this evident relationship between copycat crime offenders with criminogenic media should push for greater criminal justice policy concern. Ray Surette explained that more research on this topic is important because of the number of criminological theoretical perspectives as well as theories of crime; social learning theory, subculture, cross-culture, or life-course. It is also important to be

able to identify and recognize copycat crimes. Criminogenic media has also been said to influence imitative suicides and terrorist attacks, which is a problem in society today (Surette, 2013).

Part Four: Global Impact

The concern for the correlation between media crime models and copycat behaviors does not only exist in the United States. Several articles discussed the concerns of other countries on this topic. For instance, Dowler, et al. express their concern in their article, *Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture in the Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* (2006). The authors of the article discussed how Canadians are now exposed to American reality crime shows like *American Justice*, *Cold Case Files*, *COPS*, *Law and Order*, *CSI*, and more. Furthermore, Dowler, et al. strongly believed that the overwhelming exposure to crime through numerous media outlets had sparked a debate on whether crime news and drama have contributed to the generation of crime and violence. One argument that the authors of this article examined was proposed by Barbara Perry and Michael Sutton. They suggested that media reporting, in all forms, contributed to an environment that facilitates or encourages violence against individuals (Dowler, et al., 2006). The authors concluded that our technological society is in the process of undergoing a transformation in the conduits on crime information. Hence, the array of options in forming ideas about crime and justice increase as well.

France is another country that has experienced the effect of media generated copycat crime. In France (discussed in a previous section) more than one thousand vehicles were set on fire around the 2012/2013 New Year (Lambie, et al., 2013). In response, the French parliament debated whether to publicize the information about the fires or not, fearing that publication may inspire more copycat arsons. More specifically, the government believed that youth rivals around

France would compete to see who could cause the most damage. Under the conservative government Of Nicholas Sarkozy, he and the government agreed to withhold the New Year's car arson statistics from the public. According to reports, withholding the information led to a decrease in the number of cars set ablaze that year.

Other countries such as Uganda, New Zealand, and Germany have also experienced the effects of media influenced copycat crime. As described earlier, in Uganda, several school children were killed in a series of fires as a result of copycat phenomenon from event portrayed in the media. Similarly, in New Zealand, a teenager was sentenced for setting a peer on fire, imitating a joke displayed in the *Jackass* movies. Lastly, in Germany, an imam at a German mosque utilized the media to preach terrorist acts against the United States (Arno, 2009).

As one can see, the social problem of media influenced crime is not just a problem within the United States, but a global problem. That is why researchers express the need for more research on this topic. In the next section, experts examined the various proposal made by different countries to try and reduce the prevalence of copycat crime.

Part Five: Actions Against Media Generated Crimes

Many of the researchers involved in studying the influences of media on criminogenic copycat behavior agree it is detrimental to society financially and socially. Several of the authors mentioned throughout this paper proposed solutions to eliminate the sources of media crime models. One solution that appeared to work was when the conservative government of France decided to not release statistics about the New Year car arson tradition in 2012/2013. (Lambie, et al. 2013). In this case, even the French government was aware that media has the ability to encourage and facilitate copycat crimes. The authors suggested in their article that possible

strategies to reduce the prevalence of media generated copycat crime may include avoiding live broadcasting of events, delaying broadcasting of stories, restricting the information about a particular event (like in France), avoiding giving individuals attention during such events, making sure the media emphasizes the punishment for those responsible for specific events, and portraying the effects on the family and friends of the perpetrator. The authors of “Inflaming Your Neighbors”: Copycat Firesetting in Adolescents (2013) emphasized that the most important solution to this evident and growing social problem is to portray how common it is that individuals are caught. By doing so, the authors of this article believe people will think twice before engaging in such activity. Additionally, Lambie, et al. pointed out how media can have a beneficial role by informing and educating people about specific issues, including this one. Yet they argued that guidelines for responsible reporting do exist, and must be enforced. They believed that if responsible journalism is implemented, ultimately the prevalence of media generated copycat crime will cease.

In the article, Copycat Firesetting: Bridging Two Research Areas (2013), the authors conducted a study that tried to bridge the gap between copycat crimes and copycat firesetting. Like several other studies conducted, the researchers of this article suspect that various forms of media act as a tool to increase the quality of criminal behavior rather than the quantity. In addition, they expressed violent media and social aggression research suggested that media content reinforces criminality, contains criminal role models, and teaches that crime is permissible, justifiable, rewarded, and will ultimately generate copycats. According to the authors, not only do real world models effect criminality, but fictional media does as well. Like Lambie, Randell, and McDowell, the authors of Copycat Firesetting: Bridging Two Research Areas strongly defend policy intervention. The authors claimed that media emersion, efficacy,

beliefs, and culture are speculated to put individuals at risk of copying media portrayed acts of deliberate firesetting. With that said, the authors proposed several methods to prevent contagion within media. Yet, efforts to minimize the contagion effect came across issues such as ethics and censorship allegations. Furthermore, Surette, et al. suggested that news reporters be more careful and sensitive about their approach to reporting. They explain that not all content needs to be shown and not all information has to be revealed. The authors of this article also suggested solutions like keeping media coverage of events out of the spotlight, limiting media consumption, reducing instructional media content, and avoiding glorifying and justifying events with media coverage. With such policy interventions, researchers strongly believed that the prevalence of media influenced criminogenic behaviors would significantly decline. As others have mentioned, media can be used as an educational and informative tool. At the same time, it has been shown that individuals have used, and do use, various forms of media as crime tools. Therefore, steps need to be taken to protect the public (Doley, et al. 2013)

In his article, *Estimating the Prevalence of Copycat Crime: A research Note* (2013), Surette proposed slightly different methods to improve the problem between criminogenic media influence. First, Surette explained that with more research on the causes and motivators behind copycat crime, the criminal justice system could develop treatment and rehabilitation programs for those impacted by media crime models. Some studies have shown that certain groups of people are more susceptible to criminogenic media influence than others. For example, in this specific article, *Estimating the Prevalence of Copycat Crime: A research Note*, Surette identified male juveniles at great risk for copying crime from media. Therefore, he proposed the development of school based curriculum programs that removes the attractiveness and utility of media provided crime models and emphasizes the impacts of copycat criminogenic behaviors.

Similarly, Surette suggested the development of similar programs in correctional facilities. Surette believed that by implementing such programs, the behavioral effects of criminogenic media on criminal decisions could be deprived. Second, Surette explained that because of our understanding thus far about how copycat crime works and who it is most likely to impact, society could improve relations between media and the criminal justice system. “Specific knowledge regarding what crime-related content is most likely to generate copycat crime would reduce calls for broad content restrictions on the media as well as encourage timely release no problematic crime information by authorities to the news media” (Surette, 2013). In summary, by conducting more research on this topic, eventually researchers, scientists, and government officials will have more knowledge about crime related content. With that said, the goal would be to prevent the release of such material. Hence, less contents restrictions would be imposed. All in all, Surette said this solution would allow for timely release of non-problematic crime information from authorities and the news media.

Although the solutions provided above suggest methods to eliminate the prevalence and availability of copycat criminogenic media and behavior, some experts oppose resolving this issue. People that disagree with the influences of media on behavior and crime argue that monitoring and withholding media content prohibits people from exercising their first amendment rights. The first amendment of the United States Constitution says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances” (Constitution). Therefore, in the United States, the government cannot control what people write, video, post, share, snap, tweet, blog, etc. Hence, people can talk or write about anything, including promotions for

terrorism or suicidal behaviors as well as encouraging other criminal behaviors. But as seen in France, withholding information about copycat crimes can limit or prevent the spread of future copycat crimes. “In a pluralistic democratic society, the media must report public interest stories and should not be subject to censorship; however, bearing in mind the possible impact of the media reports on vulnerable people, a more careful and sensitive approach to reporting suicide may reduce this impact” (Doley, et al., 2013). Not only does this ideology apply to suicide, but it applicable to terrorism and other criminogenic behaviors.

In relation to modifying the first amendment to prevent speeches encouraging terrorism, suicide, and criminal behavior, researchers agree that more action must be taken to regulate the internet. Anyone with a computer can post things online. This makes content more widely available. Terrorist groups admit to utilizing media to spread their messages. Implementing some form of internet regulation would monitor the content that is being shared. If something is seen as promoting criminal, suicidal, or terrorists’ behaviors, with regulation policies, the content can be prevented from spreading to people who are more susceptible to copy criminogenic behaviors. Not only should the internet be regulated, but television programs, movies, news broadcasts, radio podcasts, social media websites, books, newspapers, and other sources for media should be monitored as well. Moreover, with less access to such content or “tools”, the prevalence of copycat crime would most likely decrease. Society would be removing the crime rudders or catalysts that encourage copycat crime.

Most importantly, experts emphasize that all information does not need to be publicized. By publicizing criminogenic events through media, viewers are often inspired by the glamorized portrayal of crime. Society must decide what is more important, freedom or protection.

Part Six: Conclusion

The issue of whether media generates crime, especially copycat crime, needs to be taken more seriously. From reports mentioned in this paper, it is an evident social problem.

Researchers and experts emphasize that it is necessary that more research be conducted on this topic in order to press for more criminal justice policies to resolve this growing problem. With more insight, experts could determine the causes of copycat criminogenic behavior. As one can see, there are several proposed hypotheses of the mechanisms for how media crime influences copycat criminogenic behavior. Researchers have proposed explanations such as biology and genetics, the social learning theory, a dose effect, a social cognitive approach, the cultivation theory, fad theory, media triggers, media catalysts or rudders, stimulation effect hypothesis, cathartic effect hypothesis, primary cause model, negligible crime models, and more. Some studies indicate that some populations are more susceptible to influence by crime media models. For example, one study concluded copycat offenders are frequently male (Surette, 2013). Another study was more specific and described younger male inmates who do not read as much, are exposed to real world crime models, spend a significant amount of time searching the internet and playing video games are more likely to view media as a source for knowledge and become copycat offenders (Surette, 2012). Other researchers determined adolescents who have high risk profiles are more likely to participate in antisocial behaviors (Lambie, et al., 2013). Finally, another study revealed youths at risk are characterized by low empathy and high sensitivity to narrative persuasion (Chadee, et al., 2015).

There are many examples that support the idea that media inspires copycat crimes. As discussed in section two, the film *Manchester by the Sea* inspired two parents to murder their son by “accidentally” setting their house on fire because they learned an individual cannot be

convicted for accidentally killing one's own children. Another example presented at the 2017 American Academies for Forensic Science annual convention involved a man who explained to psychiatrists that the television show Dexter "made him do it." In addition, the Columbine Massacre was used as a reference in many other school shootings nationwide. Many examples can also be found where media has been used as a tool to facilitate terrorism. When surveyed, inmates admit that they either considered or attempted copying a crime they observed from the media. Inmates also said that they had used media as a crime tool (Surette, 2012). Not only is it evident that media generates crime in the United States, but many countries around the world say media inspired crime is a growing problem and these nations are concerned.

As a result of the research presented, "copying of criminal behavior that lays at the crux of negative-media generated social effects, and the relationship of copycat crime offenders with criminogenic media should be a pressing criminal justice policy concern" (Surette, 2013). As proven through research, copycat behavior is a common element among offenders. Thus, such issues should be the main focus of criminal justice policies. As mentioned earlier, experts agree that a better understanding about the specific causes for copycat crimes would be learned through more research. Solid research about copycat crime would be beneficial for the criminal justice system as well. By having a better understanding of the causes of copycat crime behavior, researchers could help law enforcement better understand, recognize, and predict crime trends and development of crime clusters. Additionally, more research could be helpful during criminal investigations by enabling investigators to recognize and identify a copycat crime. By doing so, it could help investigators determine an individual's motives and techniques and could establish prevention efforts. "For example, recognition of an ongoing copycat crime sequence would allow tailored community crime alerts to be issued and targeted protective surveillance of potential

victims. Similarly, recognition of falsely labeled copycat crimes would avoid unnecessary negative effects on fear of crime levels from the inappropriate news media generations labeling of a ‘crime wave’” (Surette, 2013). More information about copycat crime would be useful for attorneys involved in criminal cases. Surette explains knowing more information about copycat crime could improve sentencing decisions by understanding the mindset of a copycat offender (Surette, 2013) Restriction of specific media content is the most logical application based on knowledge thus far about copycat offenders.

The influence of media on behavior is a topic discussed in various fields of study. Patrick Aievoli, a professor and director of the Interactive Multimedia Arts graduate program at Long Island University Post, recently published a book called *Veal: The Rise of Generation Interactive* (2016). In this book, Aievoli

investigate[s] and discuss[es] the premise that the current generation was constructed to be consumers for a transitional marketplace. As the economy shifted from analog to digital, consumers had to be trained to accept, use and progress within a new economic model through changes in societal and economic patterns. Those events are reflected in the habits and lifestyles of the current twelve to twenty-five-year-old demographic globally, and it has caused them to be the consummate consumer of digital goods based on events that have been created to develop them to be consumers and to be consumed. *Veal: The Rise of Generation Interactive* is a deft manifesto on the domestication of the young consumer into a well-cultivated piece of "veal" ready to be parceled off to greedy corporations as a permanent food source, while governments either ineptly or corruptly look the other way (Aievoli, 2016).

In other words, Aievoli explored how as a result of new technology, society has bred and molded young consumers to consume new media in the digital age. Like Aievoli summarized, corporations have taken advantage of these consumers and preyed on them while the government did nothing to intervene. This is applicable to copycat media consumption because as we observed, organizations are utilizing media platforms to prey on media consumers. By doing so, they are spreading their messages and encouraging criminogenic copycat behavior, while at the same time, governmental institutions turn their backs on this growing phenomenon.

Daniel Cox, an adjunct professor of Electronic Media for the School of Visual and Performing Arts and director of the WCWP radio at Long Island University Post, teaches about the role of mass media in today's society and culture. Cox stresses the importance media has on spreading messages to a wider audience. Cox expresses that humans are born useless, knowing nothing, and must be taught what to do. Hence, "monkey see, monkey do" Cox says. In relation to media, Mr. Cox agreed that people might imitate behaviors they observe or learn through media content. This correlates to media's influence on copycat criminogenic behavior because researchers have concluded that people do imitate media content. Therefore, if society removes criminogenic media content, "monkey will not see, and monkey cannot do". In other words, removing specific media content is likely to reduce the prevalence of copycat criminogenic media content.

In conclusion, "people are strongly influenced by [what they] see, hear, and read about crime and justice. The social construction of crime and justice loops back to influence the entire social reality of the nation" (Surette, 2015). Actions of an individual impact people around the nation and the world. "People are producers as well as products of a social system" (Bandura, 2001). People produce media content, and like Patrick Aievoli explains in his book, people are

“bred” or influenced to consume specific types of products or media content. As one can see from studies and examples, there are producers of media crime in addition to products, or copycat offenders. That is why it is crucial that more research be conducted on this topic. In today’s society, the media cannot be ignored. Ray Surette summarizes the importance of further action:

Exactly how and to what extent the media cause long-term changes is unknown, but it is clear that they play an important, but not autonomous role. The media are one engine in the crime production process, working in combination with other more significant engines, increasing and exacerbating the crime production thrusts of other social engines. Ethnic violence, racial strife, oppressive living conditions, violent cultural history, economic disparities, family destruction, interpersonal violence are all more important for crime levels and all are subject to enhancement by the media. As with individuals, it seems that the media alone cannot criminalize a country- but one a country criminalizes the media through an emphasis on predatory and unrealistic portraits, a slow spiral of increased crime and tolerance for crime begins. For modern societies, the media set the expectations and moral boundaries for crime, guide the public policies, and steer the social construction of crime and justice reality (Surette, 2015).

With more research, scientists can determine the cause of copycat criminogenic behavior and come up with a solution to lower, maybe even eliminate, the prevalence of copycat crime. A solution will further determine what legal action must be taken to ensure the safety of society. Like Ray Surette also says, “the single most significant social effect of media crime-and-justice content is... its effects on criminal justice policies” (Surette, 2015). Lastly, copycat crime is not only a topic of concern in forensic science, but is an issue discussed in several other disciplines.

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