Deviant youth in the news: a critical discourse analysis of media and participant social constructions of a contemporary moral panic

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the relationship between media and participant discourse in the construction of the contemporary moral panic of ‘youth crime’. The examination of previous research showed youth crime to be a historically prevalent topic within media and through the sensationalised construction has led to the formation of a moral panic. This research takes a critical discourse analytic approach to analysing media articles and participant accounts of the way in which youths are understood and perceived in society. From this common discourse themes; ‘hoodies’, ‘youth culture’, fear and social inequality were identified as dominating social constructions of youth. The conclusion pointed to the significance of the bi-directional relationship between media and participant discourse as significant in generating the moral panic of surrounding youth.

Key words: Moral panic  Discourse analysis  Social construction  Youth  Media
Introduction

Negative images associated with criminality and deviance has commonly characterised the mass media’s portrayal of youth. Phil Cohen (as cited in Muncie, 2004) argued that young people have to carry a ‘peculiar burden of representation’, by this Cohen was referring to the impact of media discourse used to sensationalise and demonise young people in modern society.

Studies of the content of print media have confirmed that juvenile crime has always been a newsworthy topic (Faucher, 2009), and stories describing youth as ‘out of control’ have been considered a media staple (Thompson & Stolz, 2008). However the discourse used to describe deviant youths has altered from being considered ‘wayward’ to more recently labelled ‘evil’ (Faucher, 2009). Additionally, Bostrom (2001) identified that since the 1940’s adults have perceived youths as having fewer morals and causing more trouble compared to during their own adolescence (as cited in Hilfinger-Messias et al, 2008).

This socially constructed representation of today’s youth has acted as a catalyst to public over-reaction. Schiarldi’s research claimed that even though 90% of crime is committed by adults, becoming a victim of juvenile crime is what adults fear the most (as cited in Hilfinger-Messias et al, 2008). This finding illustrates how the problem of youth has been distorted. Furthermore, a study of ‘teenage incivilities’ in Macclesfield showed that it has become criminological commonplace to emphasize that young people frequently commit low level disorder and petty crime, and this belief has led to fear of juvenile crime amongst adults (Loader et al, 1998). Chibnall’s analysis of crime reporting in British press found that growing public unease on the subject of youth activities became a dominant theme in newspaper accounts in the years after 1963 (as cited in Bartie, 2010).

The mass media have built the stereotypical image of youth and from this Cohen (2004) argued that youths have been labelled in a way that they are now considered to be a problematic subculture within society (as cited in Muncie, 2004). Bartie (2010) conducted a media analysis focusing on the topic of Glasgow gangs, and she found that youths were increasingly defined as a separate subculture perceived to be involved in a new type of deviance. From this Bartie inferred that the public comprehend the problem as more threatening than past problems. By representing the problem as a new phenomenon the media had created a moral panic. The term moral panic was first used by Jock Young in 1971; this idea was built upon by Stanley Cohen in 1972 as a concept to describe the public’s irrational concern about a condition, episode, person or group which is perceived to be a new phenomenon threatening society, the problem is presented in stylized and stereotypical fashion by the media (Welch et al, 2002). One key component of a moral panic is that the phenomenon is always depicted as ‘new’ and each generation perceives its own problem to be worse than issues from the past (Faucher, 2009). Poyting et al’s (2001) study of ‘ethnic gangs’, moral panics and media framing proved that newspapers regularly report the ‘gang problem’ as new news, yet fear of youth gangs crime is a timeless issue (as cited in Mills & Keddie, 2010).

The media is a central and influential cultural text published as a credible source of knowledge of current events, yet it creates the realities that it ‘describes’ (Mills & Keddie, 2010). Essentially the media construct moral panics by giving an original and
unique twist on an old story or issue (Welch et al, 2002). The issue is given a label from a ‘ready made stock of images’ and reported using dramatic, sensationalistic headlines which reflect previous moral panics (Bartie, 2010: 319). Moral panic is a relatively dated term, more recently explained through a social constructionist perspective (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009).

Moral panics can occur with relative ease due to the fact that positive news stories have been shown by McGill (1993) to be unattractive to mass media outlets (as cited in Mills & Keddie, 2010) therefore newspapers and other forms of media must publish negative and shocking stories in order to sell vast amounts of papers. Due to the persistent and exaggerated manner in which ‘new phenomenon’ such as ‘youth crime’ is reported, public opinion is often distorted as a result. By the media creating a demonised character of which society can dislike, blame and easily identify they are producing a negative stereotype of youth, even innocent youths have become a figure of public fear, anger and anxiety (Welch et al, 2002).

Research has discovered that in 2002 three quarters (75%) of the British public believed that youth crime was on the increase, even though statistics revealed a significant decrease in criminal behaviour. The reason given for such opinions was that it is easier to believe more negative views of youth (Muncie, 2004). It is important to note that there is a mutual influence between the content of media print and the public demand for newsworthiness, which is driven by the overlapping relationship between media and participant discourses. The discourses used to construct an event are carefully selected as they will be interpreted by people in different ways and subsequently develop the reader’s interpretive repertoires of an issue (Hall, 1980 as cited in Faucher, 2009). The media have hegemonic power to control what the public want to read and what people talk about. This is demonstrated in Dahlgren’s (2006) discourse-analytic study of a focus group conversing about everyday life, news media and politics allowing a parallel to be drawn between participant and media discourse (as cited in Schroder & Phillips, 2007).

Women in Journalism (WiJ) conducted a chiefly quantitative analysis of the way teenage boys are portrayed in regional and national British newspaper stories 2008-2009. Alongside the media analysis, 1000 teenage boys were interviewed about their perceptions of the way their age group is portrayed in the media. The aim of this research was to uncover why teenage boys have been branded as toxic, urban menaces and explore the impact this has on the attitudes of teenage boys in the UK. The researchers identified 8269 stories involving teen boys and over half the stories reported involvement in crime. As a result 85% of teenage boys reported that they thought the press represents them as a group in ‘a bad light’ and 72% of boys have changed their behaviour as a consequence of the representation. The research exposed the most common words used to describe youths in media are ‘yobs’, ‘thugs’, ‘hoodies’ and ‘louts’. From this 79% of boys felt that adults are more wary of teens now compared to one year previous (Bawdon, 2009).

An Office of National Statistics (ONS) survey by Hough & Roberts (2004) explored public opinions of youth crime and youth justice in England and Wales. The key findings were that public perception of youth crime was; increasing, more violent, less respectful and regularly over-estimated youth’s involvement in crime. Even though quantitative research gives a proportional and directly comparable
presentation of media content, this method cannot provide a rich analysis of the text components due to the controlled nature of the research. It is dissimilar to qualitative research in which the researcher becomes a component of the study allowing full analysis of the language, narratives and images which they identify as relevant (Flick, 2009).

Similarly to the WiJ research, Painter et al. (2009) carried out a content analysis of British newspapers and found that the most frequently reported issues were crime, police and drugs. They took the research a step further by interviewing a sample of young people and discovered that over 50% believed that newspapers portrayed teens in a ‘very bad light’ more so than any other type of media.

Interviews give a deeper insight into participants’ construction of the social world. Bales (2001) used a focus group of participants fitting the criteria of being a parent and presented participants with a selection of newspaper articles all depicting youths in a positive light. Shockingly, several of the participants openly refuted the articles suggesting that the reporting was incorrect.

Based on the idea that ‘media is not a harmless commentator’ (Mills & Keddie, 2010) and is a powerful mediator within social construction it can be inferred that gaining insight into the way media portrays events can lead us to understand the ideologies participants reproduce to construct the social world. A media analysis study by Faucher (2009) aims to reveal the way in which 3 Canadian daily newspapers sensationalise, decontextualise and over-represent youth crime and violence. The discourse analysis breaks down the language used within newsprint within a social constructionist analytic framework to understand the choices of discourse made. The portrayals of youth often took the form of disease metaphors, water metaphors and fear discourse. These discourses have been decoded by Faucher as a media technique to portray youth crime as a natural, disastrous problem of which magnitude overrides other issues in society. Also, Faucher discovered that youths were blamed for their involvement in crime with increasing degrees of violence discourse and binary oppositions such as innocent and evil which were regularly used as a comparison between victim and offender. The narrative of the offender often took the form of the ‘other’ portraying him/her to be unalike to the reader.

A similar pattern of discourse themes has been revealed in Welch et al’s (2002) research into the manufacture of the moral panic of ‘Wilding’ in New York. The research tracks the progression of the emergence of the moral panic by analysing the percentage of articles containing the term in a range of New York papers. From this it is inferred that ‘wilding’ has become part of the popular lexicon for juvenile crime especially in tabloid newsprint. In addition, as part of the research a discourse analysis was conducted on a sample of articles covering ‘wilding’. It was found that discourse themes mirrored those found in Faucher’s (2009) research including; animal discourse, wild discourse, dehumanizing and evil discourses. Welch and colleagues recognize the use of hyperbole i.e. dramatic discourse in accordance with Cohen (1972) who clarified it as a media tool to create a menace.

Although there has been vast amounts of research looking separately at media discourses, content analysis of media and interviews into people’s perception of youth and crime, there is a niche in the research which leads to the presentation of this research which aims to combine both media and participant discourse analysis
and the mutual relationship between these sources of information, with regard to the social construction of the moral panic surrounding youths.

This research project aims to:

1. Gain insight into the media’s ideological role in influencing participants’ constructions of ‘youth’ that they use in everyday life
2. Produce knowledge on how the media and participants’ definitional power is negotiated through particular discourses which are used to construct the knowledge of ‘youth’
3. Explore the bi-directional interdependencies between the mass media and participants’ ‘youth’ constructions

Method

Design

This research project has a qualitative design which aims to produce rich data consisting of the analysis of words, actions and artefacts used by the media and individuals in society and interpret their meaning within their social context (Burns, 2000). The depth of understanding on the topic as a result of this design is far greater compared to if a quantitative approach was taken. Quantitative research provides a purely numerical result driven by the need to approve or disprove a hypothesis (Bernard, 2006). A qualitative design is most suitable as it allows the researcher to access an understanding of the way young adults construct their realities of ‘youth’ through participant perspectives and unique experiences that wouldn’t be attainable with standardised measures such as questionnaires (Burns, 2000).

The data needed for the media analysis was gathered by corpus building which took a top-down approach (Mautner, 2008). The corpus is narrowed down from a wide selection of articles referred to by Bell (1991) as ‘the universe of discourse’ (as cited in Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2008) to a small sample that represents the most specialized for the research aims. This method of corpus gathering is most suitable for the study due to time limitations. Using a small sample of relevant articles reduces time wasting caused by data which does not lead to insight into the youth crime topic.

A semi-structured interview was chosen for conducting the interviews as it provides a flexible schedule without fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions (Burns, 2000). This accommodates for unanticipated answers to open-ended questions (Flick, 2009) which provides a more genuine picture of the subject’s perception of reality (Burns, 2000). The researcher actively engages with the stories told by the interviewee and probes for further details when relevant (Forrester, 2010). The aspects of ‘youth’ that could be discussed during the interview are vast, therefore the flexibility of a semi-structured interview evokes the communication of experiences, opinions and identities (Forrester, 2010:78) which wouldn’t be attainable with a structured interview which follows a standardised procedure and fixed questions.
Focus groups are interviews with a small number of individuals conversing about a specific topic (Patton, 2002) which holds mutual interest to the participants and the researcher (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). This method of interviewing is being used in addition to one-to-one interviews as the interaction between participants within focus groups reveals communicative dynamics and can yield a more diverse range of views and opinions from participants (Krzyżanowski, 2008). Focus groups provide more naturalistic data as the group dynamics reproduce processes of social construction that occur in everyday life (Bryman, 2004). As the research will take a critical discourse analytical approach, focus groups are relevant as they expose power inequalities between participants and reveal how dominance is enacted to manage the minds of others (van Dijk, 1993). One-to-one interviews provide a more detailed account from a single individual’s perspective (Burns, 2000), however with the lack of interaction between other people such accounts may be prone to bias and extreme views (Patton, 2002).

Discourse analysis (DA) is the method developed by social constructionists as a means of deconstructing a text to enhance our understanding of a topic based on social interaction (Fulcher, 2005). This study is influenced by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which sees discourse to be tied to power and through it participants create their social world (Schroder & Phillips, 2007; van Dijk, 1993). CDA provides understanding, skills and tools by which we can demonstrate the place of language in the construction, constitution and regulation of the social world (Barker & Galasiński, 2001:1). CDA is appropriate especially when analysing the media as it reveals the fallacy of the assumption that the media represents a neutral stance and in fact alters public discourses and opinions, and exposes the media as having a mediating and constructing role in society (Matheson, 2005). CDA is largely interested in exploring current social issues so is a relevant approach to take to the current moral panic surrounding ‘youth of today’.

The aim of the research is to analyse media and participant discourse used to construct ‘youth’ and look at the power inequalities within the discourse. CDA is most suitable for this according to Luke (2001) as it explores who has the ‘power to speak and to set the terms of their own representation in language events and discloses who lacks the power and is forced to perform a self that has been mapped out by those with power’ (as cited in Matheson, 2005:65).

Participants
A total of three male and one female participant engaged in one-to-one interviews and a further ten participants took part in three focus groups (refer to appendix 1 for more participant details).

All participants were gathered by opportunity sampling which, due to the time restrictions of the research project, was most suitable as participants and social groups who were willing to participate were conveniently accessed (Burns, 2000).

To get the best interaction from the focus groups, I conducted the interviews within friendship groups with three or four people. The purpose of using groups in which the social relationships were already formed was to ensure interaction was naturalistic and group dynamics were already established (Bryman, 2004).
Materials

The materials needed to conduct the interviews and focus groups included consent forms (see appendix 2), a semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix 3) and a Dictaphone.

For the media analysis ten articles were selected from a range of National British tabloid and broadsheet newspapers covering the ‘youth crime’ topic. For the discourse analysis of the interviews and media, coloured pens were required for coding and annotating the text.

Procedure

The process of media analysis utilised 10 newspaper articles gathered from British tabloid and broadsheet newspaper websites (The Guardian, The Observer, The Telegraph, The Express, The Sun, Daily Mail) (see appendix 4 for full articles). The WiJ ‘Hoodies or Alter boys?’ research findings were used as search criteria. The criteria included the most frequently used labels for youths in British media: ‘Yobs’, ‘Thugs’, ‘Feral’, ‘Louts’, ‘Hoodies’. These words were imputed into newspaper website search function to gather the corpus. From the relevant articles from the past five years, 5 tabloid and 5 broadsheet editorial style articles were selected. These were annotated in terms of discourse themes and power inequalities.

The dominant discourses identified were subsequently utilised for the construction of the semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix 3). The interview schedule aimed to have a duration of 40 minutes up to an hour of interview time with participants. Prior to commencing the interviews, all participants were required to read and sign the provided consent form (see appendix 2) and proceeding the interview all participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation. No personal details apart from age and gender were taken from the participants, as they were referred to using pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Once the interviews were recorded the data was transcribed, the transcriptions (see appendix 5) provide the data for the discourse analysis. The discourse analysis stage was influenced by Fairclough’s CDA (Wodak & Meyer, 2001) and a thematic approach in that social constructions were identified in terms of discourse themes.

After the media and discourse analysis had been analysed, the relationship between the two sources of data could be understood. From this, inferences are made about the interplay between media and lay discourses in constructing the social world and moral panics.

Analysis & Discussion

*Media’s ideological role in influencing participants’ construction*

The dominant talk by participants used to explain their reasons for accessing mass media were identified as; general interest, knowledge of the world and increased
awareness of aspects in society which would directly affect them as a participant. This study holds some resemblance to Schröder & Phillips (2007) in that it explores the participant’s relationship with the media and identified similar explanations for accessing it. Although the majority of individuals did not report reliance on the media, they acknowledged it as an integral part of the media saturated society (Devereux, 2003), Tabitha:

“I’m quite aware of how sensationalised the media is, which makes me not rely on it and overly trust it but that doesn’t stop me reading it” (26-27)

Participants reported little trust in the media, especially tabloid newsprint, suggesting that the media would have a minimal role in influencing participant’s constructions, Sally:

“If I want to read a bit of trash then [I read] The Sun and The Independent or The Guardian if I want to find out what’s really happening” (5-6)

Participants displayed shared knowledge regarding what sources of media they perceived likely to be more trustworthy and to have less ideological bias. The use of the word trash implies that participants are aware of the newspaper’s central role in reproducing social inequalities (Devereux, 2003) and constructing events using discourse that cannot be representative of the truth. The media has hegemonic power in that it can convince society that certain ways of thinking are in their best interest (Matheson, 2005); although further analysis will reveal that there is a bi-directional relationship between media and participant discourse, it is interesting to note that individuals believe they have immunity to the dominant ideologies present within media texts, Damien:

“You have to be cautious of the wording because media can potentially drastically alter your opinion on a certain topic.” (17-19)

Some participants were exposed to be more susceptible to hegemonic ideologies in the media than others. Through the discourse choices participants used it was easy to distinguish between people who are educated on the topic for example Criminology students, and uneducated people whose views were dominated by media constructions. Likewise to the Schröder & Phillips (2007) report, the research found that people who had an education regarding the topic of youth had aesthetic repertoires which allowed them to access media constructions of youth but take a critical distance, exemplified by Damien:

“I try to distance myself from sensationalised gossip in the papers” (229-230)

This can be explained as a product of their education taking away their naivety to the media’s ideological role. However, the participants who do not have extensive aesthetic repertoires regarding youth are more influenced by the media, Liz:

“I don’t really question the content of the paper on a serious issue” (28)

These participants are dependent upon dominant discourses within the media to be able to participate in everyday talk. Potter & Wetherell (1987) define interpretive repertoires as ‘recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomenon’. This is supported by a 2003
survey of public perception of youths reporting that two thirds of respondents specified the media as their primary source of information (Roberts & Hough, 2005).

The influence of CDA on the method of analysis allows us to gain knowledge of how the media and participants draw upon the same pool of discourses used to portray youths, (Deacon et al, 1999) to create participants’ interpretive repertoires in the social context.

**How the media & participants negotiate definitional power through particular discourses**

Five dominant interlinked discourses were identified that construct both media and participants’ interpretive repertoires regarding youths;

1. ‘Hoodies’
2. ‘Youth’ construction
3. Fear
4. Social Inequality

Definitional power is understood as the articulation or absence of interpretive repertoires (Schroder & Phillips, 2010). By exploring the dominant and counter-hegemonic discourses prevalent in the construction of youth, a broader understanding of the power inequalities between media and participants can be gained.

‘Hoodies’ – the new folk devil?

Young people are frequently labelled in the media with negative connotations such as; ‘yob’, ‘thug’ and ‘lout’ (Bawdon, 2009). The newest label for a perceived deviant youth ‘trouble maker’ is a ‘hoodie’;

“Ohoodie has become a signifier of disgruntled, malevolent youth, scowling and indolent” (see appendix 4:5)

These common labels identified in both the media and participant sample are consistent with the Women in Journalism quantitative analysis of media portrayal of youth (Bawdon, 2009). By using these labels recurrently the media is staking it's power to normalize the concept of ‘hoodie’ into everyday talk, however the hegemonic ideologies of the media have not gone un-noticed by participants who can identify the term ‘hoodie’ as a new media phenomenon, Damien:

“Ohoodie has become a label for chav types in the past few years” (89-90)

Through their talk participants showed knowledge that the youth crime phenomenon has been historically persistent within society but the media label has altered. This finding refines research by Marsh &Melville (2011) who conducted a media analysis of British newsprint and identified ‘hoodies’ to be a contemporary folk devil and a
continuation from the ‘chav moral panic’ of the early nineties (Marsh & Melville, 2011). The finding that the media is presenting an old phenomenon such as the ‘chav moral panic’ as new by changing the label to ‘hoodie’ elaborates on previous research around moral panics (Faucher, 2009; Bartie, 2010; Welch et al, 2002).

The concept of ‘hoodie’ has developed through the fashion choices made by young people being overemphasised in the media corpus as a weapon of concealment using terms such as ‘solitary and hooded’, ‘anonymity’ and ‘mystery’ to heighten participants to the potential danger of anonymous youths. Consequentially participants perceive these fashion choices to be a deviant uniform and are seen to associate the hooded garment with a certain image and attitude. Within the sample it was noted that recurrently participants talk about hoodies using violent discourse; ‘attack’, ‘knife crime’, ‘abusive’, ‘aggressive’ and ‘terrorised’. This is a discourse technique that Faucher identified within the 2009 research and supports the finding that media attributes violent acts to young people. Results from Hough & Roberts (2004) quantitative survey also reflected these results showing that two-thirds of the sample estimated almost half of all youth crime to involve violence, although statistics show that only around one-fifth of crimes involve violence. The patterns of discourse identified in the study relating to violence and fear elaborate on research by Hayward & Yar (2006) who identified ‘chavs’ as a separate ‘dangerous class’. Moreover, Faucher (2009) identified disease discourse as a construction of an increasing problem, similar patterns of discourse were found in the media corpus such as; ‘fester’, ‘stagnant residuum’, ‘infested’ and ‘plague’, which facilitated the construction of the new ‘hoodie’ problem within society. The effect of the media choosing disease discourse and negative words to portray youths exhibits that it holds the power as a dominant voice in society to influence the consumer to believe that youths are an unwanted, under-class within society.

Youth’ -The construction of a deviant subculture

The most regularly used participant discourse to describe their perception of youth is ‘trouble’ and ‘bad’. In comparison with the media ideologies regarding deviant youths as being; ‘menace’, ‘vicious’ and ‘sadistic’, the participant discourse is relatively diluted. An explanation for the disjointed relationship between media and participant discourse could be explained by participants having aesthetic repertoires of youth and a less pessimistic view of the subculture. Faucher’s (2009) exploration into the change in youth labelling over time emulates the media analysis in that youths are now presented as ‘evil’, however the participant discourse exercises counter-hegemonic ideologies that favours past labelling of ‘wayward’ depicted in the study, thus elaborating on Faucher’s findings. A technique used by the media to form moral panics is youth is a process of ‘othering,’ whereby youths are no longer viewed to be the same as ‘good’ people in society, this is summarised by Sally;

“They are kind of dehumanised. I think they ‘other’ them quite a lot” (363)

This elaborates on Pain’s (2000) research which articulated this process of distinguishing the outsiders as essential within society to retain people’s sense of community and safety. Importantly however, note that Sally used the word ‘they’ when referring to the media establishing her position as an outsider or non-
conformer to this process of constructing youths as ‘others’. This discourse choice could be construed as a signal to her position as an insider to the ‘youth subculture’.

Another prevalent way in which participants talk is in terms of youth crime being an inescapable consequence of belonging to certain groups, this is summarised by Hubert;

“\textit{I think youths in schools get sucked into youth crime culture}” (56-57)

This construction of youth culture takes the voice of an insider and characterizes youths as innocent and helpless participants and youths are essentially condemned to be victims of a society that has failed them. Opposing this, the media ideologies reflect youths as being powerful. Youth culture is a product of youths exerting their power and dominance over figures of authority such as the Police. This finding elaborates on Hough & Roberts (2004) survey results which proclaimed that 85% of respondents believed youths to have less respect for authority than their predecessors. Newspapers portray this power imbalance within society in favour of the adult dominant class becoming victims of unruly, uncontrollable youths;

“\textit{Community at mercy [of youths]}” (See appendix 4:1)

Although the media is a social agent with the power to reproduce dominant social norms, beliefs, discourses and values (Devereux, 2003: 10) the way the participants talked, engaged youthful behaviour as inevitable due to the change in societies values, demonstrating the public’s counter-hegemonic ideologies. A common perception of the moral panic was that youth culture has been cultivated from the changing society; explained by Hazel;

“I think it’s a disintegration of like morals in society” (358-359)

Closely related to this, additional participant’s views attributed youth crime to poor parenting and education and insufficient discipline. This refines the findings from Fell & Piper’s (2001) discourse analysis study which identified ‘no control’ and ‘blocked opportunities’ as an example of participant’s interpretive repertoires of explaining youth crime. They are also supported by Home Office research study 209 (Flood-Page et al, 2000) which indicated that 27% of boys (12-17 years) who were poorly supervised by their parents are likely to offend, compared to just 9% boys who had more extensive parental supervision. Also findings offer support for Loader et al. (1998) who found that youth crime was regularly implicated to a changing economy and the decline in national community (as cited in Pain, 2000).

‘Fear’- a media over-reaction?

Youth has been constructed in a way by the media that it is juxtaposed with fear discourse such as; ‘provokes anxiety’ (see appendix 4:3) and ‘campaign of terror’ (see appendix 4:8) which portrays the public response to the moral panic. This supports Welch et al. (2002) media analysis results which stated innocent youths are a figure of public anxiety and fear. On the contrary, participant discourse demonstrated a minor level of fear discourse, exemplified by Hazel:

“It was quite intimidating and you didn’t want to be around them” (196-197)
Although participants included fear discourse into their constructs, it took the form of acknowledging that other social groups are fearful of youths rather than speaking from an insider opinion. This rejects Pain (2003) and Holloway & Jefferson (1997) research to some extent which demonstrated fear discourse to be present in individuals' biographies and talk of everyday life (as cited in Pain, 2000). However, it provides support for Farrall et al. (1997) which declared the level of fear of crime and victimization to be over-represented.

The age of participants in the sample used for collecting participants data may have negatively influenced the representation of fear as individuals may consider themselves an insider of youth culture therefore hold less fearful views towards youths compared to adults.

Social Inequality

Within participant discourses two types of social inequality can be identified; class and racial which were often interlinked, to illustrate Hubert states:

“…black people in poorer areas, it means that a lot of youths who are involved in youth crime tend to be black” (78-80)

A vast amount of the participant constructions involved racial or class prejudice and attributed youth crime to be a by-product of lower class upbringing. Prejudice towards areas of poverty was found commonly in broadsheet newspapers;

“…respectable middle class lives in fear and loathing of the hooded chav underclass” (see appendix 4:2)

Media ideologies favour the dominant middle class and reflect their prejudices towards the lower class. These constructions are supported by Elliot & Ageton’s (1980) self report study which showed that lower class youths reported four times the amount of offences than middle class youths. Additionally, Home Office research found higher rates of offending in inner city areas and poor council estates (Flood-Page et al, 2000). Although the media ideologies reflect inequality, evidence suggests there is truth within the constructions. Furthermore, Hayward & Yar (2006) found that labels such as ‘chav’ and ‘hoodie’ were commonly associated with social exclusion and marginalization- a view which was regularly reinforced by British media to create the moral panic.

Bi-directional relationship between media and participant discourse

The overlapping discourse themes present in both the media and participant sample denote that there is a relationship between the two parallel systems of social construction. Previous research has noted that mass media is part of the process in which individuals form social constructions; however participants are active agents in forming constructions based upon media ideologies (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). This is supported by this research as the dominant discourse themes and labels found in the media sample are present within participant constructions, however the
display of aesthetic repertoires reveals that participants make active interpretations of media content.

An example taken from the analysis of the interplay between media and participant discourses is the labelling of ‘hoodies’ in everyday talk, giving evidence of the media’s hegemonic power over participants’ constructions. Previous research enlightened to the stylized sensationalized manner in which the media portrays a political concern to evoke a moral panic (Welch et al, 2002). Surprisingly, within the participant discourse, the word ‘street’ was frequently combined with ‘hoodie’ in interpretive repertoires suggesting that constructions are not submissive to media influences but dominated by personal experiences. Yet, due to the media labelling of ‘hoodie’ it is deduced that the media plays a role in consolidating the construction. Anderson et al. (2005) illustrated this by revealing that individuals’ experiences of youth crime was much lower than their perception of local criminal activity. This offers support for the idea that the media has dominant influence on individual’s perception of crime if it outweighs the reality of their experiences (as cited in Halsey & White, 2009). The example of labelling young people as ‘hoodies’ has ‘demonstrated how the power relationship between media and participants is complex and bidirectional’ (Gamson, 1992). As we know the interplay between media and participants is “audience driven” and the media ideologies cannot diverge far from the values of it’s consumer (Schroder & Phillips, 2007). This study is supported by Taylor’s (1996) research which showed local media’s influence on people’s perception of crime and focussed concern on fearing strangers in the street.

An issue which needs to be assessed is which systems of construction (media or participant) have the power to address the issue of youth. As the participants used within the research could be classified as ‘youths’ themselves it gives them power to speak about the topic as an insider. The dominance of the media ideologies is challenged due to their position as an outsider and this limits their ability to relate to the lower class ‘youth culture’ which they construct in text. This reveals the power inequality relationship between participants and media of which the consumer of the media must resolve when forming their own interpretive repertoires.

**Reflexive Analysis**

I am a 21 year old white British female currently living in Manchester studying for my degree in Psychology and Criminology. Even though I haven’t had any personal experience with youth crime, I have found myself to negatively stereotype against young people due to the media’s portrayal of youth. My research is based on the statement by Phil Cohen: “young people have to live with the peculiar burden of representation” (Muncie, 2004) which I found to be relevant in today’s society. From this I devised my research aims based on my interest in how individuals construct their social world and the influence the media commentator has on individual’s production of interpretive repertoires.

When conducting the interviews I used opportunity sampling with people whom I have an existing and ongoing relationship with, which may have had a negative effect on the data. As our relationship is ongoing some participants may have shown social desirability effects and not disclosed their true opinions with regard to; age, gender or racial prejudices due to fear of disrupting the relationship dynamic. Also as
the relationship was existing prior to the research began, participants may not have disclosed all their knowledge of the topic as it may have been discussed previously between myself and the individual. However, the established relationship may have been beneficial to research and led to more honest responses to questions. My social location as a female researcher interviewing male participants may have influenced the data, however as the relationship between myself and the males was established prior to the research the effect of gender difference may have been small.

When analysing the data, I may have been influenced by previous research and identified similar themes and discourses in my data.

Conclusion

By exploring the interplay between media and participant discourse, this research has illustrated the power of media labelling in the social construction of a moral panic about youths within participants everyday talk. The research revealed a contradiction between the participants' perceptions of the dominance of the media and the reality of the hegemonic ideologies upon participants. This was particularly relevant for participants who are classified as uneducated on the topic of youth crime or of people who had no personal experience with crime. These participants showed dependency on media ideologies to create their own constructions of the social world. The way in which moral panics are socially constructed using repeated discourse themes and labels was reproduced by participants in their constructions and talk on the topic of youth. Participants freely accepted media constructions of a topic they deemed to concern their own well-being, explaining why moral panics can be generated with relative ease.

Despite the contributions of the study in enlightening about the interdependencies of the media and participant discourse in socially constructing a moral panic, there are some methodological limitations worth noting. A large proportion of the participants were female, white and aged 20-23 years, this sample was not representative of the whole society therefore findings cannot be generalized. Due to the time constrictions, the media analysis was limited to newspapers, however undoubtedly newsprint only contributes to a small proportion of media accessed, especially with the increase of electronic media. An asset of the study over past media research was; by incorporating the additional element of participant discourse analysis it enabled the research to ascertain how moral panics were received by individuals which enlightened our understanding of individuals social constructions of moral panics.

Further research should use a sample which is more representative of the whole society including; more male participants and a diverse range of ages and races. From the research it was apparent that most people access media on the internet therefore the media sample should include electronic media.
References


