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Representations of Youth Crime in Canada: A Feminist Criminological Analysis of Statistical Trends, National Canadian Newspapers, and Moral Panics

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in Sociology

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Abstract

This research explores different representations of youth crime in Canada from a feminist criminological and social constructionist perspective. Using a mixed-methods approach that draws upon historical scholarly works, official governmental crime and court statistics, and national Canadian newspapers, I investigate statistical and media representations of youth crime in Canada.

Official crime and court statistics were analyzed to identify trends in youth crime and how they vary by gender and legislative changes. I provide an historical overview of changing definitions of youth, crime and delinquency, and consider how these combined with changing norms regarding morality to shape youth crime legislation in Canada from the late 18th century to the current era.

I also determined if violence among female youth has been increasing between 1991/92 and 2011/12. Previous research has been divided. This analysis finds that youth crime is not increasing, and that boys' crime continues to outpace girls' crime. Neither girls' violence, nor the severity of their crimes, are increasing, with the exception of criminal harassment and uttering threats. These increases possibly reflect changing attitudes towards bullying that have resulted in changes in charging and conviction patterns. These findings highlight how crime trends have shaped legislative outcomes, and how legislative change, in turn, shapes crime trends.

Next, I explore whether news reports on youth crime closely follow crime and court rates, or if they reflect a moral panic about youth crime, as the literature suggests. Unexpectedly, media accounts do correlate with violent crime trends, numerically, although the content of these articles often runs counter to these trends. Media accounts of boys' and girls' criminal activity is strongly shaped by gender, as well as by class, race, and age, and there is evidence of moral panics in news reporting. Moral panics pertaining to girls' involvement in crime reflect societal tension regarding changing gender norms, reflecting a 'feminist backlash.'

Media, crime statistics, and youth legislation can shape public opinion and influence the future treatment of youth in the criminal justice system in ways that are discriminatory. This research aims to counter ageist, sexist, racist, and classist beliefs about youth crime.

Keywords

Criminology, feminist criminology, youth crime, crime trends, news media, content analysis, Canada, ideology

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Chapter 1

1 Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

1.1 Introduction

For years, I have been fascinated with the topic of women and violence and have attempted to understand women's experiences of criminalization and victimization in Western societies. The research completed for my Masters' degree at *Western University* explored female-only legal defences, such as the premenstrual syndrome defence popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to understand portrayals of women's criminality. Early in my research, it was clear that female-only legal defences were often predicated upon the notion that there was a physiological defect in women's bodies that resulted in their violent behaviour. My experience researching the medicalization of women's use of violence opened my eyes to the ways women and girls are portrayed in mass media and how societal understandings of crime and deviance differ based on race, sex, age, and social class. This awareness led me to view my daily investigation of news stories differently than I had in prior years, and reflect upon high profile crime stories involving girls and women as I grew up in the 1990s and 2000s. I noticed a trend in newspapers' reporting on girls and crime: it was purported that girls in Canada (and North America) had become increasingly violent, entering the male domain of criminality. After doing a literature search, I found that several Canadian scholars had also commented on the growing fear of violence perpetrated by North American girls (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Kilty, 2010; Pate, 1999).

Canadian scholars pointed to media reports on a few high profile cases from the 1990s involving violent girls and young women, which created a 'new violent girl' or 'nasty girl' modern era folk devil (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; R.R. Corrado, Odgers, & Cohen, 2000). For example, the investigation and court case involving Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo sparked a public frenzy when it was revealed that a young woman had played a significant role in the rapes and murders of two school girls, despite her playing up the innocent school girl motif. In 1997, the murder of Reena Virk in Victoria, British

Columbia by teenage schoolgirls (and two boys) led to much discussion regarding girls' ability to enact violence on those around them (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; R.R. Corrado et al., 2000; Kilty, 2010). The onslaught of media coverage on the murder of Virk, in particular, fostered the view that the current generation of teenage girls was not only as violent as boys, but that they were actually more dangerous (R.R. Corrado et al., 2000). Media reports suggest an epidemic: girls are portrayed as being out of control and increasingly violent with their peers. Such behaviour, a clear violation of traditional gender norms, has raised social concerns (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). This type of sensationalistic reporting continued despite the fact there were several Canadian scholars purporting that neither crime, nor the severity of crime, by young girls was increasing. Although scholars debated the validity of the media claims of 'the new violent girl,' this debate received little attention in news stories, which continued to focus on the dangers of the newly created "folk devil" (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Pate, 1999; Reitsma-Street, 1999; Sprott & Doob, 2009).

Although my initial interest was centered on portrayals of girls' involvement in crime, after reading hundreds of Canadian news articles on youth crime, I was struck by the portrayals of youth crime generally. Youth crime is treated differently than adult crime in the media, with young people being cast as particularly dangerous, and 'out of control'. This led me to explore trends in youth crime, and the portrayals of youth crime in the media in order to assess the accuracy of these conclusions.

There is a wide body of research on general crime rates and trends in Canada, and much less scholarly attention on youth crime. Media coverage of youth crime has received some attention from criminologists and sociologists who have identified media-created moral panics, and explored depictions of gender, criminality, youthfulness and deviance (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Cohen, 1972; DeKeserdy, 2010; Krinsky, 2008a; Schissel, 1997, 2006, 2008, 2008; Welch, Price, & Yankey, 2002). Media portrayals of youth crime, youth violence, and gang violence in Canada and elsewhere have been analyzed by some scholars (Doob & Sprott, 2006; Fasiolo & Leckie, 1993; Porteous & Colston, 1980; Roberts & Doob, 1989, 1990; Sprott, 1996); however with the exception of a few short-term studies and analyses, only one Canadian study has undertaken a longitudinal

examination of portrayals of youth crime in Canadian newspapers (Faucher, 2007). The current study differs significantly from Faucher's work by analyzing trends in media accounts empirically, and linking these media trends with trends in youth crime. This dissertation explores media representations and statistical analyses of young offenders in Canada while paying particular attention to various factors and social structures that might influence these trends.

News media provides an avenue for understanding portrayals of youth crime but these reports are not necessarily grounded in empirical facts and can lead the public to believe that crime is more or less prevalent than it possibly is. Analyses of official crime and court statistics are needed because they can provide a more accurate representation of crime trends. This study analyzes official crime and court statistics to identify the trends in youth crime, and explore how they vary by gender and legislative change.

Subsequently, the study links the crime and court data with an analysis of news media accounts of youth crime to explore how they correlate over a 24-year period. This latter analysis explores whether media reports closely follow crime rates, or whether they more strongly reflect moral panics about youth crime, as the literature suggests. The latter analysis considers not only youth crime in general, but crime amongst girls in particular.

Two general sets of questions guide the research. The first set address crime and court conviction rates and ask:

- What are the trends in youth crime and court usage rates?
- Are crime and court rates associated with legislative changes that impact the treatment of young offenders?
- Do the statistics suggest that girls are increasingly violent?
- How do girls' rates of crime compare to boys' crime rates?

The second set of questions address media depictions of youth crime and ask:

- How is youth crime portrayed in the media?
- Do depictions of youth crime correlate closely to real youth crime trends?
- Do depictions of youth and criminality reflect moral panics?
- How are female youth involved in crime depicted in the media?

To answer these questions, I adopt a feminist criminological and social constructionist lens. To set the scene for the subsequent chapters, I now review the Canadian literature on youth crime, media accounts of crime, and girls' involvement in criminality. I begin with an overview of the social construction of crime and the problematization of youth. This is followed by an exploration of the literature on moral panics and media accounts of crime. Last, I review feminist criminological work on women and girls' criminality.

1.2 Social Constructionism and the Problematization of Youth

The application of a social constructionist lens is a cornerstone of my research. Understanding the concept of crime and criminality as being dependent upon time and space allows readers to grasp that much of what is understood to be crime is strongly influenced by hegemonic norms, values and belief systems. Central to understanding crime as a social construction is the notion that crime, criminality, and society's reactions to it are interpreted within a moral framework and therefore also serve as tools of social control to guide how individuals ought to behave in particular eras and social contexts. Thus, according to Hagan (1985) the very "act of defining crime is often, but not always, a step toward controlling it" (p.32). This section outlines the key facets of social constructionism as it relates to crime, criminality, and societal reactions to rule breaking, while also interrogating the unique place constructions of youth and youth crime have in the social world.

A social constructionist lens emphasizes that understandings of crime and deviance vary across social-historical context. A variety of social, cultural, and political factors influence the social construction of crime, and shape the experiences of those within the criminal justice system (Daly & Maher, 1998). Social constructionist approaches exist on a continuum: at one extreme are relativist scholars who believe that no objective reality exists beyond the human mind, while others maintain a more moderate viewpoint on the matter. The moderate viewpoint holds that although we may actively construct our world, viewpoints, and structures, we experience them as real (Henry, 2009). Crime, legislation, and public social concerns are grounded in evolving social structures, and deeply

entrenched systems of power and inequality (Henry, 2009). Definitions of crime and criminality can shift depending on competing social ideologies, and changing social circumstances (Becker, 1997; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, 2009, 2010). By studying both the social construction of crime and the social constructions of gender it becomes possible to see how ideas of normalcy get built into understandings of crime and deviance while simultaneously recognizing the tendency for the status quo to be reinforced so that hierarchies of power are perpetuated.

While constructionists hold that what is called a crime or who is called a criminal is dependent, in part, upon existing social structures, there is debate about whether or not the creation of law –and therefore our social norms –is a product of societal consensus or conflict (Hagan, 1985). Those that believe the law arises out of societal consensus hold that it is created as a means to help people live peaceful lives. In this vein, the creation of laws is a natural outcome of societal norms and interactions during a given time period. This viewpoint holds that morality itself is embedded in the law, as it is the primary source for its creation. Conversely, conflict theorists believe that although morality is indeed embedded in the law, its creation is a product of power and struggle. Competing moralities are present within any given society; however, those with a disproportionate amount of societal power have the ability to have their opinions regarding crime and morality solidified and ultimately codified in official pieces of legislation (Ben-Yehuda, 1986; Cohen, 1972, 2002; Critcher, Hughes, Petley, & Rohloff, 2013; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, 2009; K. Thompson, 1998, 2013). This viewpoint, dominant among critical criminologists, suggests that the unequal distribution of social capital results in the creation of laws that advantage the affluent and disadvantage and criminalize the behaviours of the poor (Herman, 1995; Quinney, 1974; Turk, 1969). What both the conflict and consensus positions share is the view that law and morality are fluid.

A theoretical framework of social constructionism posits that societal norms and values influence the classification of youth and children's deviant behaviours as either youthful indiscretions or criminal. The framing of problematic childhood behaviour as either criminal in nature or merely a phase of growth involving mild and forgivable transgressions has varied over time, beginning even before the development of the first

piece of Canadian youth criminal justice legislation in the early 1900s. Evidence suggests that during times of social upheaval, when social norms and established values are threatened, folk devils are created which scapegoat youth for societal problems (Tanner, 2001). Even in the current era, social surveys in Canada have shown that young people receive the most negative attention despite the fact they are far more likely to be victims, rather than perpetrators, of crime (Tanner, 2001, 2010). In fact, there is considerable social ambivalence about youth, as they are simultaneously regarded as risky and ‘at risk’ (K. Thompson, 1998, 2013). They are risky in the sense that they can cause social upheaval and they are at risk because of their vulnerability. This ambivalence feeds societal concern, and there has been considerable discussion over time concerning what youths’ civic roles should be.

An example of this can be seen with the treatment and mistrust of poor and minority children at the turn of the twentieth century. Canada’s history with colonialism and racism has been well-documented and it is known that young people of colour and the poor were exploited and forced to work during the industrial revolution (Schissel, 1997, 2006, 2008; Tanner, 2001, 2010; K. Thompson, 1998; Trépanier, 1999a, 1999b). As families moved to Canada to start a new life, children were expected to help to support their families and as such, poor and minority children were forced to panhandle, seek employment, or at the very least, keep themselves busy while their parents worked. At the same time, those employing children to perform menial labour embraced the dominant view that they were actually doing good by society by “educating” them, or inculcating a proper work ethic (Schissel, 2006). Poverty-stricken youth and youth of colour in urban centers were viewed with disdain and fear by members of the middle and upper classes. The first piece of criminal justice legislation, the Juvenile Delinquency Act (JDA) was created to target them, and reform their behaviour, in the early 1900s. These youth were believed to be at risk; they needed saving and resocialization into middle class norms. Here, juvenile delinquency was said to reflect a lack of morality.

In subsequent decades, many Canadians continued to link youth crime with low morals and social change. Tanner (2001) provides an example of this dating back to the late 1940s when a Canadian newspaper article suggested that violent young men involved in

gangs were the product of modern society's declining moral standards and the deterioration of the family. Similarly, in 1950s news media, youth crime was depicted as a symptom of corrupt post-war affluence, while the concerns of the 1960s centered on the social disarray that would arise from that era's forms of entertainment (Tanner, 2001). None of these concerns regarding young people were unique: for instance, commentators during Victorian times suggested that melodramas and cheap theatres would lead to violence and criminal disobedience among working-class youth (Tanner, 2001).

In all of these accounts of how 'modern' society has corrupted youth, it is implied that there was a utopic past where youth were not troubled or troubling (Tanner, 2001). This trend continues today. Currently, in North America, it is believed that young people are more disrespectful and dangerous than they were in previous generations. These notions are fueled by eager politicians and lobby groups who claim that the 'youth problem' of today is a direct result of poor parenting, dysfunctional families, the social and geographic location of poor and working class homes, immigration, and "most importantly, a lenient justice system" (Schissel, 2008, p.15). For others, it is the dismantling of the welfare state, the shift away from manufacturing employment, and high youth unemployment, that have combined to create a new 'youth problem'. For many commentators, youth are behaving in ways never seen before, and youth crime is spiraling out of control. (Faith, 2011; Schissel, 2006; Tanner, 2001, 2010).

Media reports regularly report that youth crime is rising; however, there is much debate about crime trends, and how they are best measured. These debates are discussed in the next section.

1.3 Measuring Youth Crime

Measuring crime is not only a matter of definition; a number of other factors also shape the counting of crime. Official crime statistics are the best data we have on crime rates; however, scholars have shown that these statistics may or may not be accurate reflections of the true rate of crime (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009; Bell, 2012, 2015; Carrington

& Schulenberg, 2004a; Carrington, 1995, 1999; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004, 2004; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Hagan, 1985; Henry, 2009; O'Regan & Reid, 2012; Pate, 1999; Sprott & Doob, 2010). For example, police statistics are limited because crimes may be committed but go undetected or unreported; as such police statistics likely underreport crime. There are many reasons why victims may not come forward, including the fear of retaliation, fear that their concerns will not be taken seriously, feeling intimidated by police attention, or being unaware that a crime has been committed. Even if a crime comes to the attention of the police, it may not be officially processed and could be lost in the crime funnel (Bell, 2012, 2015; Hagan, 1985; O'Regan & Reid, 2012). The criminal justice system has been described as a funnel where in the early stages of the justice process there are many cases that come to the attention of the authorities, but not all cases move forward (O'Regan & Reid, 2012). Justice authorities may choose to give unofficial warnings (or extrajudicial measures) rather than pursue criminal charges. As the processes continue, the numbers of cases dwindle as prosecutors have the discretion to deal with cases in a multitude of ways. For instance, they may choose to dismiss cases when there is not enough evidence to proceed, or divert offenders to community organizations when it is believed they would be better served with a softer approach. Only crimes where there is enough evidence and it is deemed to be in the best interest of society, will the state move forward in prosecution. The criminal behaviours that are given extrajudicial warnings (in addition to the warnings given by police) or fail to come to the attention of authorities are not always reflected in official crime statistics as a result. Further, according to Bell (2015) non-violent youth crime may be especially prone to under-estimation as young victims may be reluctant to approach the police, and the police may be more willing to give some younger perpetrators a break. There has been an attempt to control for this in police-reported youth crime statistics, and before 2008, youth statistics were separated into two categories -- those charged and those cleared (Bell, 2015). The data, however, did not include those accused and not charged. Therefore, there are many reasons why police-reported crime statistics must be interpreted with caution.

Since 2008 the ways in which youth crime data have been collected and documented by Statistics Canada have changed (Bell, 2015). As of 2008, youth statistics now include

everyone accused of a police-reported crime; meaning that statistics include not only those charged with an offence, but also those accused. Although it has been argued that police-reported crime statistics have a tendency to underrepresent the presence of crime in a society, others have suggested that this data can also exaggerate crime by reflecting societal biases and changes in policing. It has been said that using police charges and numbers of accused individuals is problematic as these practices are susceptible to changing political ideologies regarding appropriate behaviour. Moreover, not all of those accused and charged will be guilty (Bell, 2015; Carrington & Schulenberg, 2004b; Carrington, 1995, 1999; Raymond R. Corrado & Markwart, 1994; Schulenberg, Jacob, & Carrington, 2007).

Court statistics are another form of governmental data used to gain insight into the reality of crime and the way crime is dealt with in a given society. In Canada, individual courts provide information about accused perpetrators and their offences and this data is sent to Statistics Canada for analysis and distribution. These statistics complement the police-reported statistics in that they can help to show the types of dispositions given to individuals, and provide an indicator of criminal justice operations (Bell, 2015). Statistics found in court data reflect a later stage in the criminal justice funnel as this information provides only information on those that have reached this stage in the prosecution of crime. As a result, these numbers are smaller.

In addition to official governmental statistics, self-reported surveys and victimization surveys are used to capture crime that may have gone unreported or unexamined. These types of surveys are considered invaluable to researchers because they capture the 'dark figure' of crime. The 'dark figure' of crime refers to those crimes that have gone unreported, and may be unknown to authorities (O'Regan & Reid, 2012). Some self-reported statistics have suggested that rates of crime may be between four and ten times that found in police-reported statistics (Bortner, 1988). The Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) is an example of one source of data on self-reported crime. The NLSCY is a long-term study of children and youth in Canada that "follows their development and well-being from birth to early adulthood" and includes questions that relate to young people's involvement in criminality (Government of Canada, 2009, para 1). The original

longitudinal populations are surveyed throughout the years to capture trends over time. Each survey is referred to as an additional cycle. I did not rely on these data because the cycles were not all statistically representative for youth 12-17, making the data unreliable. Similarly, I did not use victimization surveys because they do not capture common offences and focus instead on crimes against individuals and households (Bell, 2015).

Regardless of the tools used to capture crime statistics, they are inherently flawed in that they rely on hegemonic understandings of crime and criminality (Bell, 2015; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007) and all have methodological limitations that undermine our ability to capture and track these behaviours. The validity of statistics -- whether police-reported, court, or self-reported surveys -- is influenced by many societal factors including political pressures, policy changes, public perceptions of crime, police administration, criminal justice training and others (Bell, 2015). I chose to rely on crime and court statistics because, while not ideal, they offer one of the few ways to track crime and court trends over time in a manner that is relatively consistent.

1.4 Representations of Crime in Media

Criminologists have commented on the ability of mass media to inform the public about crime and crime control, and have suggested that the images, ideas and narratives that are presented in the media impact how individuals in society feel toward crime and justice (Best, 1999; Burns & Crawford, 1999; Chesney-Lind, 1999; Doob & Sprott, 2006; Jewkes, 2011; Sprott, 1996; Surette, 2015; Tewksbury, Miller, & DiMichele, 2006; Williams, 1994). The social constructionist approach highlights the impact that media has on crime and the criminal justice system. As mentioned above, social constructionists maintain that changing structures, cultural trends, and social forces have the ability to change societal viewpoints on various topics. When considering crime, beliefs regarding the causes of crime, the treatment of offenders, and legislative changes are but a few of the possible outcomes of publicized crimes based on (mis)perceptions of severity (Doob & Sprott, 2006; Jewkes, 2011; Sprott, 1996; Surette, 2010, 2015). According to Surette

(2015), the media comprise possibly one of the most important elements in the conceptualization of crime, criminality and criminal justice for most individuals in Western society. Likewise, Tewksbury, Miller, and DeMichele (2006) argue that media has the ability to affect the public's perception of crime and, as a result of this, can inform politicians of potential issues and concerns that can be added to political campaigns. Because media shapes public opinion, it also influences the political support individuals may lend to candidates they feel take their crime control concerns seriously (Tewksbury et al., 2006). In this manner, media may shape political campaigns and policy-making (Tewksbury et al., 2006).

Competing social constructions of crime are presented and debated within media stories as powerful groups and a variety of claims-makers push different cultural themes to the forefront (Surette, 2015). Various claims makers use the media to convey their social constructions of, and proposed solutions to, crime, with the goal of changing policy. Claims makers include a variety of activists, criminal justice professionals, politicians, and others, who tout specialized knowledge regarding criminal justice issues professing to know the best solutions or policy changes to address the issue at hand (Surette, 1992). In addition to this, 'symbolic crimes' are often taken up by individuals and groups to alert the public about the need for changes to criminal justice policy. These select crimes are paraded within media reports in order to advocate for particular belief systems regarding crime and justice. They may be used to support a narrative that a particular type of crime is becoming more common, or support a particular policy solution to fix a perceived problem (Surette, 2015). Unfortunately, those in powerful positions are better able to have their constructions of crime given legitimacy in media, while other viewpoints are either never considered or focused on less frequently (Jewkes, 2004). The result is the emergence or reification of a dominant social construction of what should be viewed as a crime, how we should treat offenders, and whether crime is increasing or not (Jewkes, 2011, 2015; Littlefield, 2008; Surette, 1999, 2015; C. Y. Thompson, Young, & Burns, 2000; Walgrave, Soroka, & Nuytemans, 2008; Williams, 1994).

The reality that certain crimes receive more media attention is not new. In the 1960s, critical criminologists began examining the ways that certain types of crime and

criminality garnered more attention than others. This phenomenon has been referred to as a ‘moral panic.’ According to Stanley Cohen (2002), one is able to identify the existence of a moral panic when portrayals of a particular event become so distorted that it no longer reflects reality. The term was first used in relation to his study on the “mods” and “rockers” in the 1960s and 1970s (Cohen, 1972). The mods and rockers were two opposing groups of young people in Britain and on Easter Sunday of 1964, nearly one hundred youth were arrested when windows were broken, rocks were thrown, beach huts were damaged, and several scuffles broke out, all while motorbikes and scooters noisily drove up and down the streets (Cohen, 1972, 2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, 2009). Rather than portraying the incident as an occurrence that was bizarre and rare, media reported the incident in wildly fantastical language suggesting that youth mob violence and vandalism posed a serious threat to British ways of life. The issue of mob violence remained a prominent social concern as media, the police, the public, politicians, and other organizations perpetuated the myth that youth mob violence and vandalism was a major phenomenon, when in reality these types of crimes were unusual (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

As a result of the exaggerated depiction of a particular social problem, Cohen (1974) argued, ‘folk devils’ are created. These folk devils reflect stereotypes of social deviants viewed as posing a threat to society (Ben-Yehuda, 1986; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, 2009; Krinsky, 2013; Schissel, 1997, 2006, 2008). In Cohen’s (1972) example, groups of young people became ‘mobs’ that threatened British society. Folk devils become “personifications of evil” with their status as a social problem being validated along with an unquestioned and concerted effort to halt the problem (Schultz, 2008).

The concepts of ‘folk devils’ and ‘moral panics’ fit well with theories on social constructionism and critical feminist criminology as they both situate definitions of crime and criminality as creations of the social world. Hall and colleagues have expanded the use of the term ‘moral panic’ to reflect a “diversionary manifestation” of a deep-seated historical crisis (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Krinsky, 2013). In their understanding of a moral panic, they include Marxist analyses of a disconnect between capitalism and social progress and a need to maintain the status quo and existing

power relations where it is understood to be normal that some individuals have a lot while others have very little (Hall et al., 1978). Inherent in moral panics is a social control element: there is a sense that something ‘ought’ to be done to fix the problem and oftentimes this means a moral reconfiguring of society (Schissel, 2006). While this particular study does not focus on Canada as a capitalist society per se, this interpretation of moral panics is integral as it helps us to understand the reification of dominant hegemonic structures.

To understand statistical and media depictions of youth crime, and to explore the presence of moral panics, this study questions classical crime control ideologies, reductionist beliefs about the causes of youth crime, and essentialist notions of gender. Scholars have shown that concerns about youth crime and girls’ involvement in crime are directly tied to the arguments made by proponents of traditional crime control ideologies that crime is a result of societal breakdown, social change, or a lack of adequate forms of social control (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Ben-Yehuda, 1986; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Cohen, 1972, 2002; DeKeserdy, 2010; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, 2009; Hall et al., 1978; Krinsky, 2008a, 2008b; Schissel, 2008; Schultz, 2008; Springhall, 2008; K. Thompson, 2013, 1998; Welch et al., 2002; Zatz, 1987).

Crime, legislation, and public social concerns are grounded in evolving social structures, and deeply entrenched systems of power and inequality. Despite public awareness that much of what is viewed in media is unrealistic and highly edited, media representations continue to influence peoples’ views of reality. Various types of crime and social phenomena are constantly being described as new and especially alarming (Welch et al., 2002). The ‘blurring of fact and fiction’ has resulted in a fast-paced media environment where it is hard to discern the difference between entertainment and news. Surette (1992) states, “like candy to cavities, a diet heavy on media will rot your perception of reality” (p.4). Media, criminal justice policy makers, and moral entrepreneurs expose the public to constant rhetoric which is ‘cycled and recycled’ to keep popular punitive ideologies in constant rotation as the sensible option (Surette, 2015). These simplified beliefs regarding crime control ultimately influence how societies deal with crime. Local and isolated criminal justice problems are treated as symbolic references to supposed social problems,

and used to lay the ground work for broad-based policy responses and changes (Surette, 2015).

1.5 Gender, Feminist Criminology and Girls' Involvement in Crime

Like crime, gender is socially constructed. What it means to be a man or a woman varies by social-historical context, and reflects dominant expectations about gender. Feminist criminologists have explored how gender norms, and gendered social structures shape men's and women's criminal behaviour. For some, criminal behaviour by boys and men is shaped by hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define 'hegemonic masculinity' as a pattern of practices that reinforce men's dominance over women, and the power of dominant men over subordinate men. Both dominant and subordinate masculinities may shape criminal behaviour (Messerschmidt, 1993). Hegemonic masculinity is shaped by class, sexual orientation, and race, with the masculinities embraced by more marginal men being variations on hegemonic masculinity that are socially devalued, or sometimes viewed as threatening to the dominant social order (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 1995, 2005; Kimmel & Holler, 2011; Kimmel, 1993, 2004). Boys learn to associate with hegemonic masculinity, which in Western societies often includes the use of physical violence (Connell, 1995, 2005). The emphasis on violence and toughness is often intensified amongst working-class men and boys, whose ability to achieve and acquire other masculine markers of social success may be limited (Kimmel, 2004; Messerschmidt, 1999). Emphasized femininity is a companion concept to capture practices that structure gender roles and practices for women – ones that are usually in compliance with hegemonic masculinity. If men are often cast as tough and violent, women are seen as more nurturing, caring, and non-violent (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These concepts are valuable for scholars interested in gender and crime as they highlight the extent to which gender is shaped by social context, social practices, and power divisions in society.

It is important to recognize that there are a multiplicity of femininities and masculinities that could be adopted by social actors (Messerschmidt, 1999). Moreover, there are

penalties for actors who embrace marginalized masculinities or femininities, or who deviate substantially from the hegemonic ideals. Similarly, there may be status gains from conforming to hegemonic masculinity. A young man who gets in a fight, for instance, may gain status among his peers for toughness, even if he is charged with assault. The consequences for women may be far different. A young woman who gets into a fight, may not only be charged with a crime, but receive social disdain for her unfeminine behaviour. Crime and violence are seen as more of a male domain. To some extent, crime is seen as a natural extension of masculinity. In contrast, femininity is associated with passiveness and compliance; women's deviance may be ignored or severely punished.

Within the emerging field of criminology in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, crimes committed against women, as well as the offenses committed by women and girls tended to be ignored (Comack, 2011; Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Faith, 2011). Women were excluded from scholarly analysis because criminality and aggressive behaviours were thought to be the domain of men and masculinity. When criminologists did discuss criminality, it was often with reference to a common "(mis)conception" about women's innate and biological characters or natures (Smart, 1977). Early criminologists attempted to discover the unique reasons why women might commit crime and how these reasons differed from men's reasons. For instance, the "Father" of scientific criminology Lombroso and his son-in-law Ferrero speculated that women were naturally passive and gentle; only an abnormal inner biological pathology led them to commit crime (Lombroso & Ferrero, 1895). If women's natural evolved state was to be passive and gentle, then there was clearly something wrong with those who failed to meet these expectations. In contrast, while male lawbreakers also fell victim to atavistic characteristics, they were not deemed to be failures to their gender. Those few women who strayed into a life of social deviance and crime were to be feared: they were believed to hold innate and undue strength along with depraved minds (Smart, 1977). Not only did female criminals possess similar characteristics to male law-breakers, but they were also 'cunning, spiteful, and deceitful,' possessing the worst possible characteristics of women (Smart, 1977, p. 33). What made these women particularly dangerous was their ability to

hide behind the guise of a false femininity while embodying the most dangerous characteristics of both male and female criminals.

Drawing on the concepts of atavism and Social Darwinism, Lombroso and Ferrero's (1895) work suggested that women who disobeyed the social contract must be biological throwbacks from previous stages in human evolution, since crime had been traditionally understood as a biologically masculine practice. Because they linked women's crime with biology, classical criminologists failed to explore social explanations for women's behaviour. Since crime was equated with masculinity, women who took part in criminal activities were simplistically deemed "too masculine." This line of thought has permeated into both academic and lay views of crime and gender, influencing more recent accounts of women's crime. Women who commit crime are often regarded as 'unnatural' and 'unfeminine'. Ultimately, this is a form of social control that keeps women and girls in subordinate social positions and 'doubly pathologizes' women for being 'unfeminine' and breaking the law (Smart, 1977).

Early feminist scholars critiqued the fact that traditional disciplines used men, men's bodies and men's experiences as the basis of normalcy and either generalized their analyses to women, or viewed women, their bodies and their experiences as "other" or deviant (Smart, 1977). As a result of this exclusion from academic analysis, the goal of early feminist empirical research on female offenders was to "document women's lives, law breaking, and victimisation" (Daly & Maher, 1998). This meant researching those who feminists felt were the "forgotten offenders" and "silenced victims" (Burgess-Proctor, 2006, Daly & Maher, 1998). An example of this is the work done by liberal feminists who began explaining women's and girl's crime rates as a result of their sex role socialization. Burgess-Proctor (2006) explains that liberal feminists believed that men and boys' had higher rates of criminality due to their gender socialization, which rewarded them for being competitive and aggressive. Women and girls, on the other hand, were socialized to be nurturing and passive, which provided them with fewer opportunities in life to commit crimes (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). While documenting the lives of those forgotten by mainstream theories is an important task, early liberal feminist criminologists often relied on essentialist notions of gender and crime like those before

them. Early feminist criminologists also failed to acknowledge the ways social structures and forms of inequality influenced women and girls' involvement in crime and their experiences within the criminal justice system.

Implicit, in these early feminist theories, is the essentialist idea that masculinity and femininity are biologically based; masculinity results in dominance, aggression and toughness, while femininity results in passivity and niceness. Just as these types of theories do not interrogate our understandings of femininity, they also fail to acknowledge how male criminality is shaped by culture and society (Daly & Maher, 1998; Messerschmidt, 1993). Macro-level social arrangements shaping men's and women's behaviour remain undertheorized in these early works. Moreover, these theories treat masculinity and femininity as static, ignoring the ways in which gender norms and expectations vary across time and space (Messerschmidt, 1993). Instead they endorse a dichotomous view of gender.

An example of this can be seen with the quasi-feminist suggestion that girls and women will become more like men – and hence more deviant and violent -- as they obtain more political rights (Adler, 1975; Simon, 1975). Liberal feminist Freda Adler (1975) stipulated that women used violence to “establish themselves as full human beings, as capable of violence and aggression as any man” (Adler, 1975, p.15). In other words, emancipation meant that women would have to adopt masculine behaviours in order to succeed within society. While Adler's equality theory of crime remains popular today both in media and scholarly literature, the theory has been heavily criticized by contemporary feminist criminologists (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2010; Chesney-Lind et al., 2010; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Daly & Maher, 1998; DeKeserdy, 2010; Faith, 2011; Males, 2010; Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996; Steffensmeier & Clark, 1980). One critique is that while women may be involved in greater amounts of crime than they previously were, their crime patterns are not identical to men's: they tend towards less serious and less violent criminal activity (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). Studies have shown that women are most likely to commit survival crimes such as prostitution, drug dealing, status offences, theft and fraud, all of which

typically do not entail violence (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996). Also, scholars have shown that, oftentimes, women's and girls' pasts are speckled with emotional, physical and sexual abuse and that the need to escape unhealthy and abusive relationships and situations has resulted in women being charged with crimes of survival. Once women have escaped these situations, they are usually still at risk of experiencing violence as they attempt to protect themselves on the streets and stay afloat during economic hardships (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996).

In an attempt to move beyond the equality theory of crime and similar models that rely on an "add women and stir" (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988) approach to crime, feminist scholars in the 1980s and 1990s began to deconstruct traditional research methods and ideologies about gender and use this knowledge to enhance our understanding of crime. Over the past several decades, third-wave feminists set out to highlight some of the gaps of 'malestream' thought by focusing on women's experiences of criminality and how they differ by various cultural factors (Comack, 1999). Like feminists in other disciplines, there was an effort to reject the monologic of mainstream androcentric theories and present work that focused on bettering women's lives. Third-wave feminists concerned themselves with the inclusion of a multiplicity of experiences across race, class and gender (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). For instance, they asked how might one's experience of race, class and gender influence one's experiences of abuse and criminalization within a post-colonial Canadian context? These questions primarily arose from anti-racist feminists, lesbian feminists, third world feminists, feminists of colour and other marginalized groups who questioned how feminist knowledge was produced and evaluated (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). This led to the use of postmodern and poststructuralist theories within feminist literature to deconstruct existing forms of knowledge and create more nuanced and considerate partial truths (Daly & Maher, 1998). In doing so, the second phase of feminist criminology sought to explore the differences among women and avoid first wave feminists' attachment to essentialism (Daly & Maher, 1998). This was an important shift within feminist criminological work because it marked a shift in the types of research questions that were being asked within the field. New questions targeted how social structures impacted various individuals' involvement in crime and their experiences of crime.

Feminist criminology after the 1980s was concerned with the ways legal and criminological discourses shape women and girls' experiences. Further, feminists have acknowledged the multiplicity of experiences for women in conflict with the law, and considered how these experiences are shaped by various cultural factors (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Faith, 2011). As a result of this theorizing, the concept of intersectionality was developed (Daly & Maher, 1998). Scholars who use an intersectional approach realize that gender, class and race do not shape one's experience separately, but rather they can be experienced simultaneously, and have a multiplicative or combined effect (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Scholars researching crime using a feminist intersectional lens examine how gender, race, class, ability and other axes of power interact to contribute to an individual's experience of social inequality. This form of research stipulates that inequality cannot be understood by examining one axis of power independently from the others because they are interrelated and intersect with one another simultaneously.

There are many benefits associated with an intersectional approach: specifically, this approach enables researchers to understand the ways race, class, and gender combine to influence the portrayals of youth crime in Canadian media (Chesney-Lind, 2006).

Intersectional research on crime has challenged the arbitrary distinction between victims and offenders. Feminists such as Chesney-Lind (1989) and Carlen (1987) document how poverty, familial circumstances, racial inequality, and abusive households contribute to girls' criminal behaviour. As a result, feminist scholars have been able to understand how victimization can lead to criminalization within subjugated populations, showing that the line between victimization and criminalization is not always clear. Racism, classism, and abuse not only lead to criminality, but also can shape social responses to deviant behaviour. Disadvantaged individuals may experience more societal disdain, and may be viewed as challenging social norms cherished by the privileged.

This latter response is captured in Meda Chesney-Lind's (2006) work on the "feminist backlash". She suggests that a political backlash is taking place within Canadian and American societies, one that seeks to use nostalgic standards of morality to demand a return to traditional and nuclear family values (Chesney-Lind, 2006). Not only are women and men policed in this backlash, so too are people of colour, and anyone that

challenges the status quo. Any attempt to secure rights for women and people of colour might result in criminal justice or social policies that adversely affect these populations. A current example might be the on-going fight for women's reproductive freedom in the Western world during an era that attempts to reduce women's access to birth control and abortions, and criminalize their behaviours through the use of foetal rights rhetoric and the various restrictions placed on women's ability to have an abortion. Arguments used to limit women's access to abortion are often tied to moral debates about women's sexuality and our understandings of proper femininity. Like abortion debates, women's involvement in crime threatens beliefs about the traditional roles for women and men, and has resulted in backlash.

As many have commented before (Hagan, 1985; Sutherland & Cressey, 1955, 1978) laws are generally made by people in power to control the behaviour of others. According to Chesney-Lind (2006), the United States is experiencing a "sophisticated and energized right wing" that has been in existence since the Civil War and Reconstruction and it has been focused on maintaining unequal race and gender relations (p.4). Chesney-Lind (2006) has suggested that the current backlash has resulted in the use of the politics of crime and traditional moral values to further racist and classist ideologies surrounding people of colour. The changing structures in society which have resulted in women, youth, people of colour, and other disenfranchised groups acquiring greater rights and freedoms in North America have spurred the demonization of these groups within media and calls for policy and political measures to return to the traditional life where these individuals knew their place as subordinate (Chesney-Lind, 2006).

Although crime and the various forms of inequality are social constructions, they are real in their consequences, and maintained by power structures in society (including capitalism and patriarchy). Although, these structures and constructions may sometimes be rigid, they are never completely static and have the ability to both alter the behaviour of others and be altered by social changes. In other words, power is never absolute (Foucault, 1988). At the center of feminist criminology is the need to include activism in scholarship in the hopes of altering the legal landscape by making policy reforms that

will produce a more just criminal justice system that takes into consideration a multiplicity of truths (Burgess-Proctor, 2006).

1.6 Girls, Crime, and Media

Chesney-Lind's (2006) notion of the 'feminist backlash' can be characterized as a particular type of female-centered moral panic, one that builds on essentialist notions of femininity and masculinity. The backlash is predicated on the notion that women and girls are inherently non-violent and subordinate, and the belief that they should accept their lesser and nonthreatening positions within society. Feminist criminologists argue that it is important to examine the depiction of gender roles in media accounts of violent crimes because images of 'emphasized femininity' reinforce sexist ideologies of women as docile, passive and fragile (Chesney-Lind, 1999). Like Lombroso and Ferrero's theories of female deviance, when women are charged with violent offences, it is not uncommon for them to be cast in media depictions as excessively masculine and not fully feminine. In the same vein, aggressive and violent women may also be viewed as victims of extenuating circumstances beyond their control. News stories often reflect mainstream societal values and, typically, news articles reinforce these gendered stereotypes of women regardless of whether they are victims or perpetrators of violence (Carll, 2003).

When women are involved in crime they are seen to have deviated from traditional gender norms of femininity. According to Jewkes (2004, 2009), media outlets tap into and magnify deeply rooted public fears about deviant or violent women, while paying much less attention to equally serious male offenders whose profiles do not violate gender norms in the same way (Jewkes, 2004, 2011). The notion of the violent woman or the murderess creates a particular problem for traditional gender categories because these types of women do not appear and behave as norm-abiding passive women, thus placing them in the category of 'other.' Distorted representations of women and violence (e.g., female criminals as monstrous, hypersexualized, erratic, and uncontrollable) are

especially damaging because they have the potential to mislead the public into believing that these distortions represent what is real and accurate in our society (Carll, 2003).

Generally, when women do not adhere to ideals of femininity and domesticity, they are considered to be bad mothers and wives. These gender tropes inform popular media depictions of criminality, and this can be clearly shown in examples of media reports of women who kill their spouses. Aggressive or violent women who physically harm or murder their spouses are displayed as the epitome of bad wives, regardless of the context in which the offence occurs (Jewkes, 2004, 2011). However, this cultural script often works in reverse when women are the victims of male violence. For instance, if a husband were to kill his wife, the woman is frequently shown to be responsible for her own victimization because she transgressed her role as a good wife. Jewkes (2004) provides an example of this phenomenon when she reflects on a criminal case in which a husband murdered his ‘nagging’ wife. The trial transcripts show the judge remarked that the deceased victim would have ‘tried the patience of a saint’ (p.120).

Female offenders’ violation of gender norms influences not only media portrayals, but sentencing as well (Chesney-Lind, 1999; Edwards, 1984; Jewkes, 2004, 2015; Ross, 2010; Williams, 1994). When women are convicted and sentenced, they are often judged on how well or poorly they adhered to the proper norms of femininity. For example, defense attorneys may present evidence to prove to the judge or jury that their client performed her roles as a good wife, mother and homemaker in order to convince the court that their client is a ‘normal’ and non-dangerous woman (Edwards, 1984). When women are charged with petty criminal acts, the transgression of normalized gender roles can be viewed as justifiable if the courts believe that the offender embodied the characteristics needed to be a good wife and mother. However, if the criminal act was violent and involved spousal homicide or infanticide, it is extremely difficult for the public to imagine the woman as feminine –i.e. as a “woman” – since she appears to have violated the gendered norms of the “good wife” or “good mother”.

Dating back to the 1970s, media accounts appear to have embraced Adler’s (1975) equality theory of crime. Women’s violence has been linked to the women’s movement,

which is said to have had dangerous unforeseen consequences (Chesney-Lind, 1999, 2006). In a 1971 *New York Times* article, a journalist contended that “[w]omen are gaining rapidly in at least one traditional area of male supremacy –crime” (Chesney-Lind, 1999, p.121). More recent news stories continue to depict female criminals as masculine, or cast women’s criminality as behaviour that makes women more like men. Media coverage, not infrequently, demonizes feminism.

The creation of a new folk devil, ‘the nasty girl,’ in the 1990s reaffirmed public anxiety surrounding the changing roles for girls and women previously seen in the 1970s (and prior). The moral panic was indicative of the belief that girls were disregarding traditional facets of femininity and adopting behaviours believed to be uncouth, materialistic, and improper. Underlying these fears was nostalgia for an imagined past where girls and women did not challenge stereotypical behaviours of passivity and domesticity (Barron & Lacombe, 2005). ‘The nasty girl’ then became the folk symbol of social decline (Barron & Lacombe, 2005).

As I noted earlier, media reports can shape public opinion, and thus have the ability to shape policy change. For instance, in her study on mothers who use social assistance, Williams (1994) found that media images that cast welfare mothers as deviant or ‘other’ resulted in a noticeable negative shift in the perceptions of these women, which in turn, she argues, resulted in changes in social assistance legislation. In a similar vein, depictions of youth crime in news media have the potential to influence the public’s perception of childhood deviance and ultimately influence the creation of youth legislation. Although studies have been conducted on depictions of youth crime in media reports, few studies have examined this issue longitudinally.

One important exception is Faucher’s (2007) Simon Fraser University PhD dissertation which examined media representations of youth crime between 1901 and 2000 with a sample of 1937 news articles (Faucher, 2007). Faucher (2007) examined, at random, one month’s worth of news stories every four years from 1903 to 1999 to determine how representations of youth crime varied from year-to-year in three different Canadian newspapers and how the rhetoric in news stories compared to crime trends among young

offenders. In her research, she found that i) that youth crime was newsworthy and stories on it tended to be prominently placed within newspapers; ii) representations of youth crime were simplistic and not contextualized; iii) rhetoric reinforced gender conformativity; iv) news in Quebec utilized similar simplistic and decontextualized narratives, despite greater emphasis on social welfare and preventative measures; and v) alarmist reporting was typical of stories on youth crime (Faucher, 2007). Faucher's research reveals the nature of reporting on youth crime, but not its impact. The link between media reports, crime trends, and legislative changes was not explored. For instance, media reports on youth crime were not analyzed for the particular years that the Juvenile Delinquents Act (1908) and the Young Offenders Act (1984) came into effect. The reports and frequency of news reporting on youth crime during these times of legislative change are of particular interest within my research. My research links youth crime reporting in national newspapers with crime trends, and legislative change.

A rising number of studies have highlighted the ways in which both crime and representations of crime in the media are gendered. However, few studies have linked the two, exploring whether, and to what extent, representations of crime are reflective of real crime trends. Furthermore, while scholars have begun to explore criminal activity using a gender lens, this lens has rarely been applied to research on youth crime. Studies which examine the portrayals of crime, criminality and responses to crime are important to help deconstruct the messages, themes, trends, ideologies and understandings of criminality that are being delivered to the general public, and to understand how the prevailing dominant social structures influence crime. Moral panics can distort real-life trends and alter the public's perceptions of crime, potentially having a significant, negative, impact on policy formation (Jewkes, 2004; Tewksbury et al., 2006).

1.7 Current study

This study uses a feminist social constructionist perspective to inform interpretations of youth crime statistics and news media accounts. Where possible, I have also adopted an intersectional lens, but because official crime statistics are not provided by race and class, my analysis focuses on gender, which is easier to document. Recognizing the limits of

determining what the ‘real’ trends in youth crime are, I analyze trends in female and male youth crime. Further, I explore the relationship between crime trends and media accounts to determine if there is evidence of moral panics in Canadian news media coverage of youth crime, and to assess how youth are being portrayed in media reports. To explore trends in youth crime, I draw on Statistics Canada data. To examine media accounts of youth crime, I have analyzed national news stories on youth crime over a twenty-three year period. Throughout the analyses I consider the impact of legislative changes on youth crime statistics and reporting. As noted, research has tended to look at these elements -- crime trends, media accounts, and legislative changes -- separately. The innovation of this research is to bring them together. This is an important innovation because popular media and the representation of crime, crime statistics, and youth legislation have the ability to sway public opinion and influence the future treatment of youth in the criminal justice system.

This dissertation has a manuscript structure, with four core chapters, exploring different aspects of these issues. Each chapter contains distinct, but related, research questions. The first two integrated manuscripts explore representations of youth crime using different types of justice statistics, secondary data and historical sources. Chapter 2, the first article in this dissertation, provides an overview of the trends in juvenile delinquency and youth crime in Canada from 1900 to the current era, while paying special attention to the shifting definitions of crime and criminality, and the impact of legislative changes on criminal justice. The core research question is, how have legislative and social changes affected youth crime and court rates? In answering this question, I explore the different ideologies and theories of crime that underlie the different pieces of legislation. In so doing I highlight different social constructions of youth crime, and the criminal justice authorities and moral entrepreneurs that shape them.

Chapter 3 explores trends in youth crime, with a special focus on gender. The research questions explored in this article are as follows: (1) are Canadian youth becoming more violent? (2) Do trends in crime rates vary by gender? (3) What is the impact of the 2003 Youth Criminal Justice Act on youth crime trends? To answer these questions, the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) is used to determine whether or not violent and

non-violent crime convictions increased among Canadian youth between 1991/92 and 2011/12. This chapter takes a gendered look at court trends to assess whether the evidence supports the assertion that girls are beginning to outpace boys in their participation in crime. In this regard, the chapter explores how crime rates have been impacted by legislative change.

Chapters 4 and 5 link trends in news media accounts of youth crime with real crime trends. These chapters build upon the empirical and secondary data analyses from chapters 2 and 3, adding in a focus on representations of youth crime in Canada. The research questions in chapter 4 are as follows: (1) How does the quantity of news articles, specifically about youth crime or youth violence, compare to official crime rates in Canada between the years of 1991 and 2014? In other words, does the quantity of news articles vary according to crime rates? (2) If news articles trends do not reflect crime rates, what appears to be driving them? (3) Is there evidence of a moral panic? To answer these questions, I conduct an examination of articles on youth crime published in three popular national news outlets. I explore trends in the number of news articles published, and consider the content of those articles as well, to obtain a clearer picture of trends in news reporting on youth crime over time.

Chapter 5 entails a similar analysis, but focuses on girls' crime. My research questions are similar to those in chapter 4: (1) Does the quantity of news articles specifically about female youth crime or violence reflect trends in official guilty court findings in Canada between the years of 1991 and 2011/12? (2) If they do not, then what appears to be driving them? Are they reflective of a moral panic? (3) Are there folk devils associated with the depictions and is there evidence of a feminist backlash? Here, I draw on an analysis of media accounts of girls' crime since 1991, and link these accounts to official court statistics. Both the quantity and the content of the articles is explored. Literature on moral panics and the feminist backlash is drawn on to explain how broader social structures influence the portrayals and treatment of young people in trouble with the law in Canada.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, the Discussion, I consider the implications of these several analyses for our understanding of youth crime trends, and the depiction of these trends in news media. I consider the implications for youth, legislation, and societal understandings of men, women, and crime. I argue that the results from this research study show how youth crime and justice is differently understood in varying historical and political contexts.

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Chapter 2

2 Ideology, Youth Crime, Changing Legislation, and Statistical Trends: An Overview of Youth Crime Ideologies and Crime Rates as Influenced by the Juvenile Delinquency Act, Young Offenders Act, and the Youth Criminal Justice Act

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of trends in juvenile delinquency and youth crime, focusing on official crime statistics. It reviews how trends have been impacted by legislative changes. Specifically, trends in delinquency and criminality are studied from the early 1900s throughout 2013 to examine the impact of the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* (1908), the *Young Offenders Act* (1984), the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (2003), and the *Safe Streets and Communities Act* (2012). The focus is on how criminal justice authorities and moral entrepreneurs shaped and responded to legislation. The information is taken from a variety of historical and secondary sources, including archival data (The Canada Yearbook), and official Canadian statistics such as the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), and the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS). While locating statistics and information relevant to each of the eras is possible, direct comparison across time is difficult due to shifting definitions of ‘youth’ and crime. For instance, between the 1900s and early 1980s, youth who came into contact with police were not charged with a particular crime, but rather given a charge of ‘youth delinquency,’ which was then grouped into different classes of offences. Not only have definitions of crime changed over time, but so have the ways in which crime and court usage have been tracked historically and across province (Bell, 2015; Carrington & Moyer, 1994; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004; Schissel, 2006; Trépanier, 1999a, 1999b, 2003). Despite these many changes, what has remained fairly consistent over this time is the view that youth ‘crime’ reflects first and foremost moral failing.

2.2 Late 1800s and Early 1900s

In the early 1900s, there was growing concern about the street youth that populated urban Canadian areas. During the 1800s and early 1900s, there was a considerable amount of immigration to Canada as Canadian officials sought European and Chinese immigrants to help build the Canadian Pacific Railway, populate Western Canada, and to work as servants for the Canadian elite. Entire families immigrated, with many adults dying *en route* to Canada across the Atlantic Ocean (Reid, 2012). Those travelling to Canada were promised better lives; however, when they arrived they faced considerable hardship (Des Dixon, 1994). Every family member, including very young children, had to work long hours just to make ends meet. In this manner, immigration, combined with urbanization and industrialization, led to the expansion of the urban poor (Reid, 2012). Also, due to parental loss, and the need for all family members to work to support a family, many children were left to fend for themselves in urban centers if they were unable to acquire employment. Children who were unable to secure a position in various Canadian industries roamed the streets of urban centers, shining shoes, foraging for fuel, or engaging in a variety of other activities. It was perhaps inevitable that these youth would begin engaging in behaviours that members of the middle and upper class viewed as delinquent or criminal (Bell, 2012, 2015), especially in light of the significant change in middle-class ideologies concerning children, the family, and childrearing that occurred during this era (Des Dixon, 1994; Ryan, 1981).

Child labour was common not only in Canada, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also in the United States and Europe. Indeed from at least the Middle Ages through the early modern period, children were essentially viewed as ‘miniature adults’, and were expected to complete their fair share of work within the household as early as five and seven years old (Reid, 2012). In fact, early settlers believed that work was to be a normal part of a child’s life: hard work, prayer, study and discipline (Siegel & Welsh, 2010). As such, it was not rare to have children working 10 to 14 hours daily during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Many believed that working-class children (and women) were better able to operate simple machinery in factories, thus leaving adult men to carry out more ‘difficult’ duties (McIntosh, 1999). Children living on farms were not

exempt from hard work and labour; they were expected to undertake onerous tasks alongside the adults (Siegel & Welsh, 2010). Not only were young people believed to be well equipped for hard labour, it was a familial expectation and obligation.

By the mid-nineteenth century, childhood came to be defined as a separate phase of life, prior to adulthood, characterized by middle-class notions of childhood innocence and dependence. Children were expected to be subservient to the male patriarch and to be protected and nurtured (Siegel & Welsh, 2010). Children were no longer simply viewed as little adults. Child rearing came to be viewed as a moral responsibility and something that required care and attention; middle-class people in this era believed that children could not be left to their own devices. Children running around the city unattended would get into trouble, as the result of 'parental neglect.' So-called 'child savers' began to speak out against what they labeled the 'mistreatment' and 'neglect' of minors by working-class parents. As a result, 'juvenile delinquency' was defined as a social problem in this era, with the term being used to identify lower class and immigrant children without parental supervision, as well as those children involved in criminal behaviour (Trépanier, 1999a). Juvenile delinquency encompassed not only young people in trouble with the law, but also behaviour believed to be negative or immoral that ran counter to the values and morals of middle and upper-class citizens, such as intoxication and panhandling (Sangster, 2002).

Growing concern with working-class and immigrant lifestyles and their impact on the morality of children and youth led to two middle-class movements that shaped the definition and treatment of youth delinquency. First, in the late 1800s, Children's Aid Societies and other child protective agencies were created and they began to acquire authority over children believed to be victims of parental neglect. Second, a group of middle class reformers and upper-class women, at the time called the 'Child Savers,' emerged. They believed that youth who engaged in delinquent behaviour were primarily disadvantaged, and were not necessarily the hardened criminals evidenced in the adult population. For members of both groups, youthful indiscretions were largely the result of inopportune situations, a lack of proper guidance, the effects of drunkenness in the family, and genetics. Prevailing theories at the time also purported that criminal activity

was not solely the product of free will, as those within the Classical School and liberal ideologies previously believed, but rather arose out of situations that young people could not control (Trépanier, 1999b). Thus, these reformers believed that wayward youth needed proper guidance rather than the harsh punishment of adult institutions.

According to Sangster (2002), the goal of these early reformers was to instil discipline, morality and a hearty work ethic in poor and working class children. Since they believed working-class parents were not providing this kind of guidance and instruction, an effective criminal justice system should intervene. They fought to separate young delinquents from the hardened criminal influences of adult offenders, and place them within institutions especially equipped to deal with young people. The belief at the time was that young people were more malleable than adults when it came to delinquent behaviour and that if the state could act in a parental role, under a welfare model, then young people could be reformed into useful and productive citizens (Reid, 2012; Schissel, 2006).

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the undertakings of these agencies and reformers were purely altruistic in nature. While there was concern about the welfare of lower class and immigrant children in Canada, anxiety ultimately stemmed from the perceived threat to the societal order with the entrance of ‘dangerous classes’ into the urban milieu during the industrial period. Ultimately, the children protection agencies, in addition to upper class reformers, merely identified a broader societal concern with the potential threat that these ‘dangerous classes’ of young people posed to Canadian values. These groups successfully lobbied for a legislative solution, and the first piece of youth justice legislation, the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* (JDA), was drafted and passed in 1908 (Schissel, 2008).

Rather than placing young people in the criminal confines reserved for adult offenders, the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* (JDA) of 1908 placed children in reformatories. As suggested by the word itself, reformatories were designed with the assumption that reform or positive change was possible for problematic youth. Essentially, the JDA operated under the assumption that young people were morally pliable, and they could be

reformed to adopt middle and upper class norms. While this ‘gentler’ treatment of youth might seem ideal, the focus on morality meant that poor and working class girls and boys were subject to judicial reformation for non-criminal behaviours called ‘status offences’ (Faith, 2011). Status offences included acts such as truancy from school, running away from home and promiscuity – behaviours that violated middle-class social norms.

The JDA dealt with problematic behaviours of those aged 7 to 18 years old. During this time, the age that a young person was transferred to the adult justice system varied across the country with some as young as 14 being treated as adults in some provinces, while others as old as 18 were treated as juveniles in the province of Quebec (Doob & Cesaroni, 2004; Trépanier, 1999a, 1999b, 2004). These variations create problems for researchers attempting to trace historical trends since current youth legislation only captures the misdeeds of those aged 12 to 17. Additionally, rather than being cited with a particular criminal charge, youth treated under the JDA were charged as ‘juvenile delinquents’ (Doob & Cesaroni, 2004). This meant that the state maintained guardianship and control over the young person until it was felt by justice authorities that the young person was no longer a delinquent (until the age of 21). The purpose of indeterminate sentences for youth was so that the young person could be treated for as long as it took to get the individual to abandon their delinquent ways.

2.3 JDA Era: Trends between 1908 and 1983

Because youth working-class behaviours were considered ‘criminal’ according to middle-class notions of morality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, youth crime rates surged. Behaviours, such as truancy, which in the past might have been part of a working-class families’ survival strategies (having children work, or forage for fuel and food) were now defined as problematic. Carrigan (1991) indicates that crime rates among those under the age of sixteen rose 124% between the years of 1911 and 1921. Canada’s adult crime rate also rose steadily from the late nineteenth century to 1970 with a significant crime wave appearing around 1914 (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984). This

particular crime wave appears to be uniquely Canadian, because it did not occur in other Common Law countries. Brantingham and Brantingham (1984) attribute rising adult crime rates to the combination of Canada's late industrialization, patterns of urbanization, and increased immigration. Historians and criminologists have similarly linked increases in youth crime to increases in population, the growth of cities, immigration, and the poor's inability to care for their children (Bell, 2015; Carrigan, 1991; Sangster, 2002).

Although youth crime rates rose during the 1920s, the overall number of crimes committed by young people remained low and crimes were petty in nature, with the bulk involving theft (Carrigan, 1991). The majority of offenders tended to be native-born white males that came from urban centers and families without adequate supports. Despite periodic fluctuations, the general trend in crime rates between 1921 and 1931 was upward, with crime peaking in the early years of the Great Depression (Bell, 2015; Carrigan, 1991; Sangster, 2002). The profile of youth crime during the 1930s and early 1940s remained similar to that of the 1920s with some fluctuation and overall increases. Sangster (2002) explains that during this era, the upper classes worried that working class youth would become a further threat as unemployment and poverty rates grew. Despite these concerns, by the end of the 1930s, crime among youth began to decline in many Canadian cities. This decline was short lived and by the beginning of World War II, arrest rates began to soar with scholars suggesting that these changes were largely a result of demographics and differences in policing, rather than strictly increasing criminality (Bell, 2015; Carrigan, 1991; Sangster, 2002). During World War II and into the Cold War, there was considerable social anxiety regarding the stability of families, which may have affected policing, and social responses to youth crime (Sangster, 2002).

Looking at Statistics Canada data on juvenile delinquency trends in the latter half of the 20th century, it can be seen that rates fluctuated, but that an overall upward trend continued between the 1940s and 1960s. Historical data from the annual Canada Year Book show that court rates among youth grew relatively steadily between 1950 and 1964 with most categories of crime seeing some increase (Statistics Canada, 1967). Demographic factors are likely responsible for the 1960's increase in juvenile delinquency, as it was in this era when the baby boomers reached adolescence and early

adulthood (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984). Carrigan (1991) describes this era as one with considerable upheaval as individuals that lived during the Great Depression and Second World War attempted to give their children all the material items they did not have. Also predominant during this era was the attempt to shield young people from urban life through the creation of suburbs, and a greater emphasis was placed on domesticity and family life. By the late 1960s, the influence of drug culture among upper class youth encouraged a rebellious counter culture that led to increases in juvenile delinquency; specifically, “rape, assault, theft, vandalism, and promiscuous behaviour were all part of the drug scene” (Carrigan, 1991, p. 230).

The spike in youth crime led some to question the effectiveness of the JDA (Tanner, 2001; Trépanier, 1999b). The public began to grow increasingly dissatisfied with the state of youth justice legislation as youth crime rates continued to climb. Furthermore, many young offenders were repeat offenders. This suggested to many that the ‘gentler’ approach under the JDA was insufficient in dealing with young offenders (Tanner, 2010a). There were great worries about the JDA’s ability to protect the public from ‘wayward’ youth.

In addition to the increasing crime rates, critics of the JDA were also concerned with the inequities evident in its application, which, they argued, led to particular groups of individuals being more vulnerable to social control based on racist, classist and sexist ideological structures. These inequities, combined with the discretion granted to judges under the JDA, led to disparities in charging: harsher penalties were given to some minority youth compared to others. Stark differences in the ways young people were dealt with throughout Canada became evident; for example, more privileged individuals had greater access to diversion and community-based sentencing (Bala, 1993). At the same time, a concern for the legal rights of children and youth grew, with many pointing out the ways in which young people were not granted due process under the JDA.

These concerns amplified as crime rates for both adults and youth continued to rise in the 1970s. Figure 1 shows the UCR reports, standardized per 100,000, for youth crime in

Canada between the years 1977¹ and 1984. Crime rates for major violent and property offences for Canadian adults increased during the early 1960s to the early 1980s by more than 100 percent.² Violent crime continued to rise into the early 1970s before leveling off slightly in the 1980s; these rates were the highest recorded crime rates in Canada (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984). Carrington's (1999) research shows (like the raw UCR data in Figure 2-1) an increase in police reported crime in the late 1970s and a relatively stable pattern in the early 1980s. Evidence suggests that during the 1980s, growing numbers of young people were able to acquire firearms with little difficulty (Carrigan, 1991). Carrigan (1991) argues that the 1980s marked a new era for young offenders, with youth participating in gangs and engaging in serious types of crime. However, the trends documented by Carrigan (1991) were soon to reverse, as Figure 2-1 shows.

¹ To track police reported crime committed by young people, researchers utilize the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), which calculates the rate per 100,000 of crimes that came to the attention of the police. The UCR has produced a historical record of national crime trends since 1962, however it did not begin to produce reliable data until 1977 thus limiting the period of time that can be investigated for this study. Other limitations in the data include the fact that the information cannot be separated based on age and sex. This creates problems as the JDA included all youth between the ages of 7 and 17 years old and the age at which a young person could be transferred to the adult court system differed by province. In previous studies by Carrington and Moyer (1994) and Carrington (1999), this results in the under-estimation of any increases of youth crime in the years after the YOA was implemented as the JDA included a larger range of young people. While this is true, these scholars also point to the reality that few young people between the ages of 7 and 11 take part in crime to begin with and older youth are more likely to be involved in criminality. In hopes of offsetting this limitation, Carrington (1999) used UCR statistics from 1992-1993 to estimate that the inflation of per capita rates of crime caused by those aged 7 to 11 under the JDA would have been 5.3 percent of accused. To adjust for this, the statistics between 1977 and 1983 were adjusted downwards by 5.3% for young people apprehended. Similarly, the rates of juveniles charged were decreased by 2% in earlier research (Carrington & Moyer, 1994; Carrington, 1999).

² Major violent crimes include the following: criminal homicide, attempted murder, manslaughter, wounding, assaults, and robbery. Major property offences include: breaking and entering, theft of a motor vehicle, theft over \$200, and theft under \$200 (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984).

Figure 2-1: UCR Youth Crime Rates per 100,000 between 1977 and 1984



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

2.4 YOA Era: History and Trends between 1984 and 2002

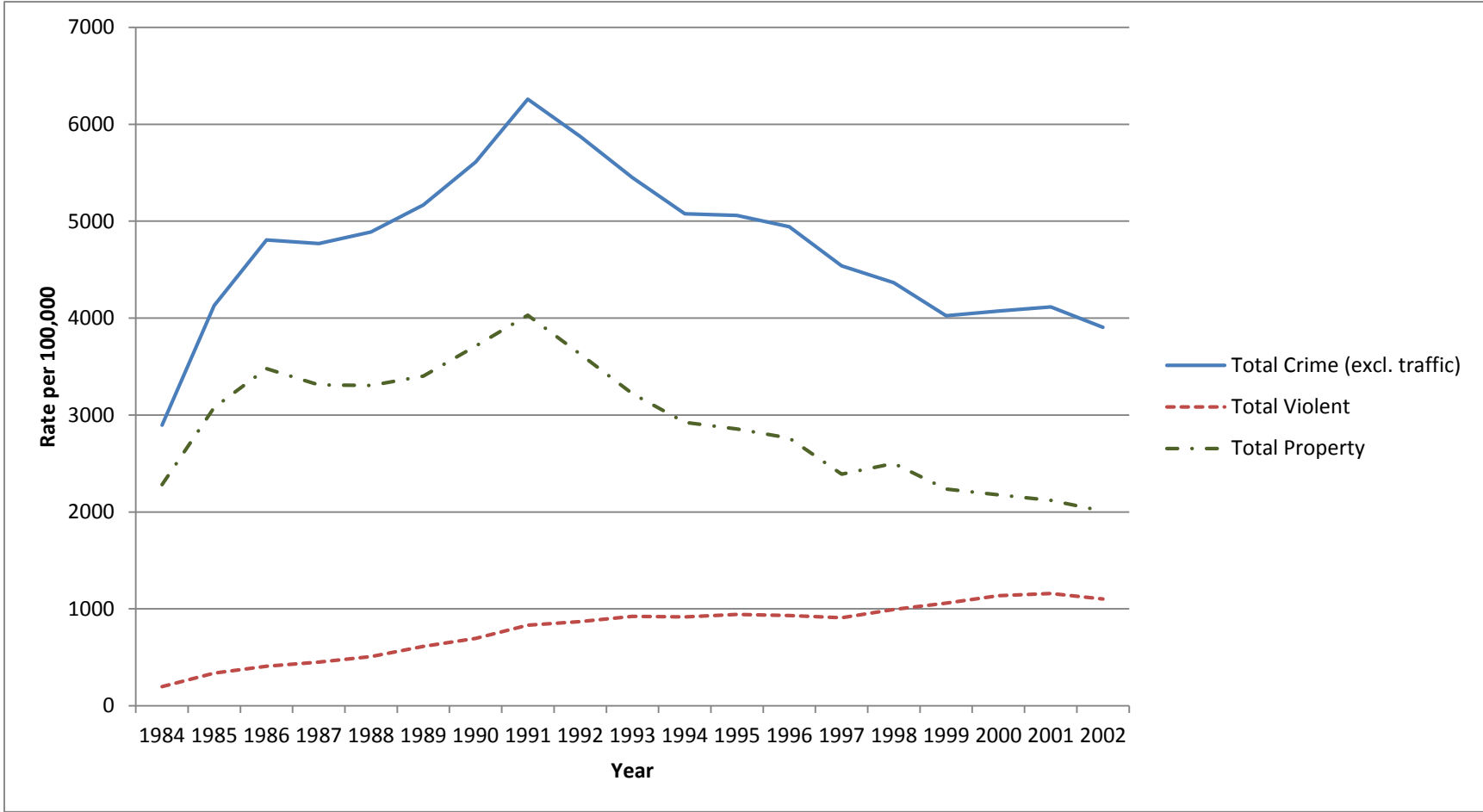
On April 2nd, 1984 the *Young Offenders Act* (YOA) came into force, changing how justice authorities dealt with youth in trouble with the law. The name itself suggests a firmer approach to youthful indiscretions; the language used to characterize wayward youth changed from ‘juvenile delinquents’ to ‘young offenders’. The federal government hoped the new act would overcome the Juvenile Delinquent Act’s many deficiencies. As noted, by the early 1980s, the JDA was believed to be biased and soft on crime. Civil rights advocates were concerned with the JDA’s lack of transparency and public access to youth court proceedings, youths’ limited access to legal advice, and the ongoing use of status offences and indeterminate sentences. The JDA was said to undermine young people’s rights and freedoms. It is not surprising that interest in ‘due process’ and age-based discrimination emerged in this era as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms became entrenched in law in 1982 (Bala, 1993).

The YOA of 1984 sparked the beginning of a new era that was based on an amalgamation of three different philosophical justice models: the justice (or ‘due process’), crime control, and the welfare model. Under the welfare model, crime among youth was characterized as delinquency and the product of a poor upbringing with young people needing rehabilitation and guidance. Like the early child-savers, proponents of this model sought legislation that would provide moral reformation for disadvantaged youth. The justice and crime control models, on the other hand, hold that individuals choose to commit crime. The two differ in that justice models are concerned with due process and the certainty of legal fairness; whereas, crime control models attempt to repress criminal conduct through deterrence, denunciation, and punishment (O’Regan & Reid, 2012). The impact of the three models can be seen in the YOA’s provisions. First, crime control models encouraged harsher punishments for young people that would be closer to what adults received, in order to overcome the leniency associated with the JDA. Second, justice models helped to ensure that young people’s rights and freedoms were being considered as they journeyed through the criminal justice system. Finally, the welfare model could be seen in the YOA’s promotion of diversionary and community-based prevention tactics at its core. According to Pate (1999), the YOA was initially founded on

youth-positive principles and had the intention of holding youth responsible by having them rehabilitated and reintegrated into society by using the least restrictive forms of intervention. This meant that whenever possible, young offenders would be sent to open-custody facilities rather than entering closed-custody institutionalized settings (Pate, 1999). Procedural fairness, individual accountability, rehabilitation and reintegration were all envisioned as having a place within the youth justice system.

In practice, however, this hybrid of the three philosophical models did not work well. In fact, it was never fully implemented as intended. Ideally, young people were to be held in open-custody facilities and take part in community corrections, yet it was left to the provinces to funnel money into these programs (Trépanier, 2004). The provinces were not able to fund such interventions, with the exception of Quebec. It was the crime control emphasis on incarceration that was embraced by many. To replace the JDA's supposedly 'soft' punishment in reformatories and training schools, the YOA brought an increased emphasis on deterrence and incapacitation that was known as the 'short swift shock'. Youth were subject to short bouts of incarceration, in an attempt to deter them from future criminality. What was at odds within the legislation was the assumption that rehabilitation was somehow possible at the same time. As a result of the lack of community programming across the country and the growing "zero-tolerance" policies being developed in the 1990s in Ontario and elsewhere, much of Canada saw large numbers of disenfranchised youth getting caught in the web of punitive criminalization (Pate, 1999). During this time period, Canada had court and custody rates for young people that surpassed all other countries, including the United States (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2010).

Figure 2-2: UCR Youth Crime Rates per 100,000 between 1984 and 2002



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

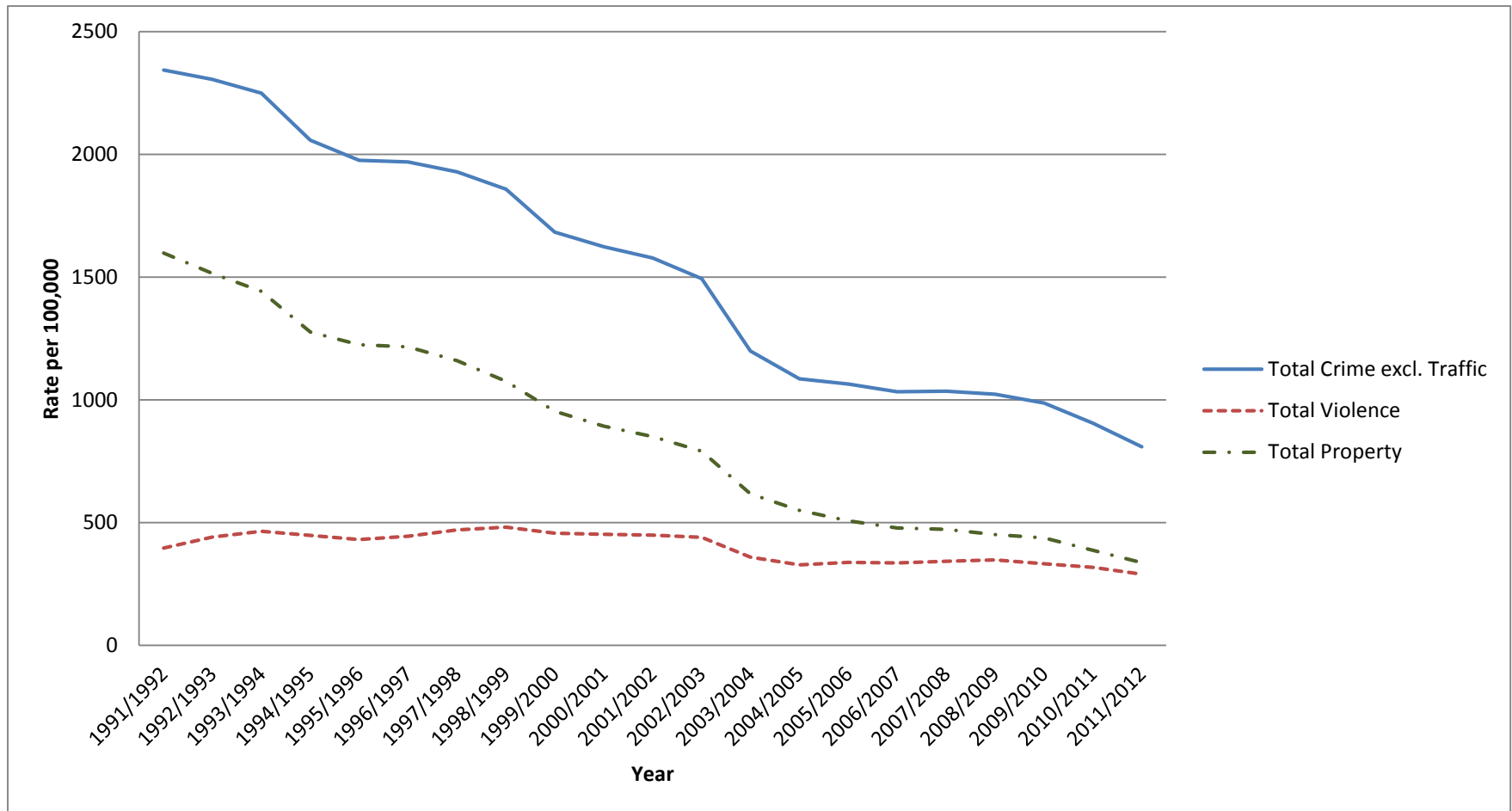
Figure 2-2 shows youth crime trends in the decades following the implementation of the YOA. While the trend lines show an increase in crime following the YOA, Carrington (1999) argues that the upward trend likely had more to do with policing practices. In Carrington's research, he describes a statistically significant increase in police-reported youth crime between 1986-96 and the average rate of young offenders charged between 1980 and 1983 (Carrington, 1999). He believes that this statistical jump, like the one seen in the early 1990s, was not caused by the YOA but rather reflects a more general crime trend evident in other countries as well. This peak continued until the early 1990s, when crime rates started to decline again. Many scholars have noted the decrease in youth crime rates beginning in the early 1990s, shown in Figure 2-2 (Bala et al., 2010; Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009; Bell, 2015; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004; Doob & Sprott, 1998).

Figure 2-2 shows a small bump in crime rates in the early 2000s; however, after 2003 the downward trend continues (Figure 2-4). Bell (2015) also describes the increase in police-recorded crime in the early 2000s as temporary. Downward trends in youth crime are further reflected in youth court data provided by Statistics Canada, shown in Figure 2-3. The Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) combines Canadian youth and adult court statistics between the years of 1991/92 and 2011/12.³ Looking at Figure 2-3, it can be seen that there is a relatively stable decline in youth court rates in the 1990s, which parallels what was depicted in the UCR data in Figure 2-2. This trajectory continues

³ This data was obtained from Statistics Canada's website CANSIM socioeconomic database and collected by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. The purpose of the survey is to develop and maintain statistical information on the instances where individuals appear in court accused of offences under federal statutes. The ICCS tracks the most serious offence by a particular individual and data is drawn from each province. Like other types of governmental surveying, it is suspected that there is a potential for under-coverage in the ICCS due to a criminal justice system that funnels out offenders at various stages in the criminalization process. The data that pertains specifically to youth captures the youth court rates of those aged 12 to 17 at the time of the offence. The ICCS data does not account for population changes in Canada's youth so the table was amended to reflect the population for each particular year per 100,000. Unlike the UCR crime rates for this time period, the ICCS tracks the court rates by sex and a similar declining pattern is seen for both girls and boys between 1991/92 and 2001/02 (Statistics Canada, 2014).

downward after 2003 when the YOA was replaced with the Youth Criminal Justice Act (2003).

Figure 2-3: ICCS Youth Court Rates per 100,000 between 91/92 and 2011/12



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Integrated Criminal Court Survey

In the final decades of the twentieth century, the YOA was the subject of controversy, and pressure to revise the legislation emerged. In the years following the 1984 *Young Offenders Act* (YOA), conservative politicians and police chiefs, especially in Ontario, criticized the act as being too lenient on young offenders while calling for a more punitive replacement. Members of the public echoed these sentiments in a Toronto study stating that under the YOA, punishments were not proportionate to the crimes youth were committing (Barber & Doob, 2004). Carrington & Schulenberg (2004) said that from the start, the YOA was a public relations disaster as youth crime rates steadily grew during the first ten years that the act was in place. The causes of rising crime rates among youth were heavily debated within the political and legal spheres during the 21 years the act was in effect (Bala, 1993; Bell, 2015; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Trépanier, 1999a, 1999b, 2004). Between 1991 and 2003, the Reform Party (Canadian Alliance Party), which eventually merged with the Progressive Conservatives, lobbied for harsher punishments for young offenders using the ‘get tough’ rhetoric that was popular in the United States (Cernetig, 1993; Cox, 1992; Elkin, 1992; Trépanier, 2004).

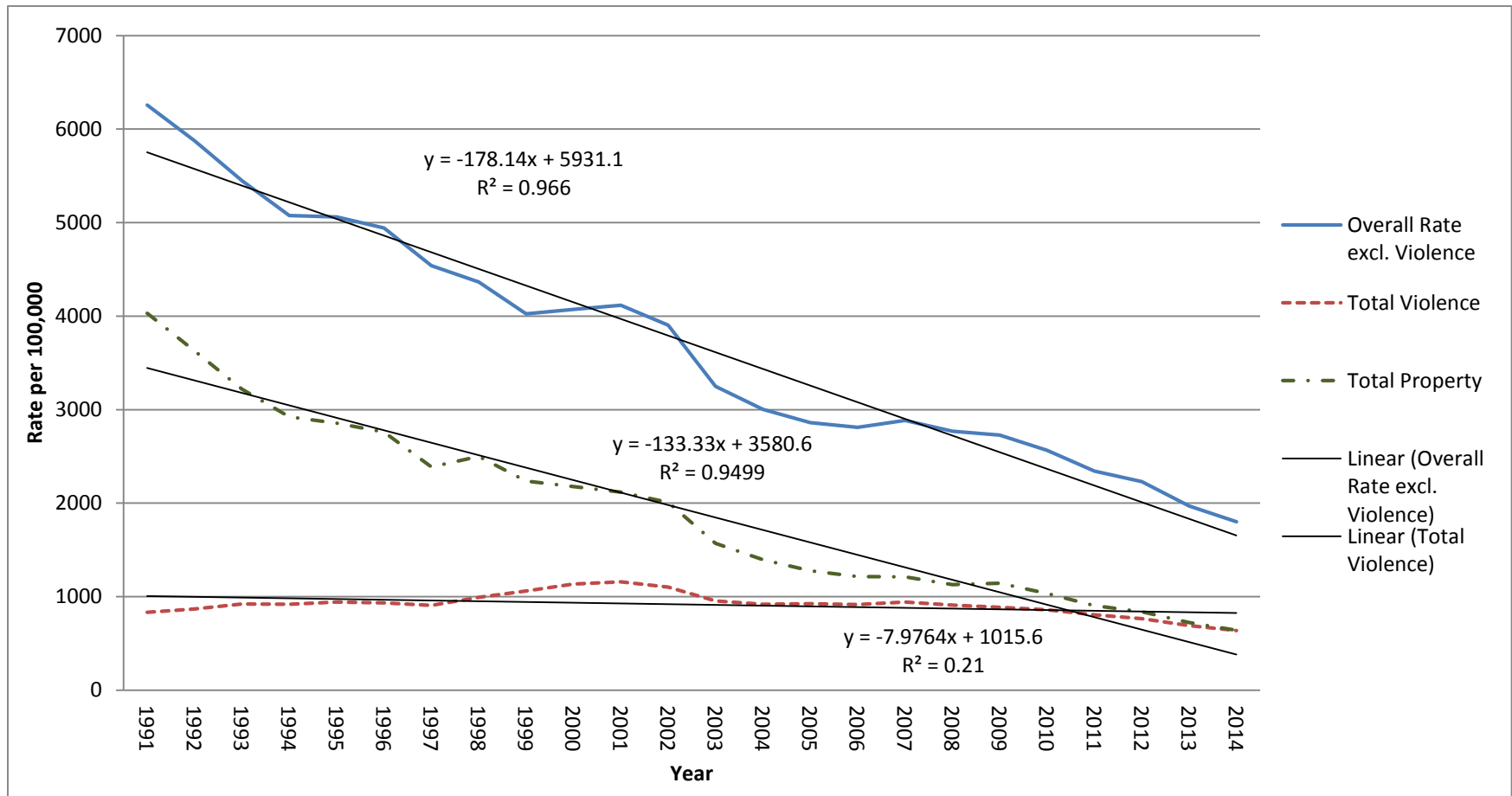
The debate regarding the effectiveness of the YOA emphasized the ideological differences between the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. According to Carens (1995), Quebec became increasingly liberal over time, more so than the rest of Canada. As a result of these left-wing leanings, politicians in Quebec argued against implementing harsher punishments for youth because it was feared that it would lead to a youth criminal justice system that was too similar to that used for adult offenders (Trépanier, 2003, 2004). Politicians in Ontario, on the other hand, have historically been aligned with conservative ideologies; for example, the province was labeled the “big blue machine” between the early 1940s and late 1980s (Howlett, 2008). Later, in the mid- 1990s and early 2000s, Ontario started the “common sense revolution” under the Conservative Mike Harris provincial government (Campbell, 1995). Many in Ontario felt youth crime measures needed to be tougher. The new federal crime legislation in the early 2000s tried to balance these disparate interests.

2.5 YCJA Era: Trends between 2003 and 2013

The *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) was drafted by former Justice Minister Anne McLellan. In 2003 it came into effect and the YOA was repealed. The goal of the new act was to decrease the use of the courts, find alternatives to custody for young offenders and to work with serious youth offenders more effectively (Bala et al., 2009; Barnhorst, 2004). What was unique about this act was that it stipulated different treatments for different types of youth offenders. Due to growing concerns that some youths were out of control, serious youth offenders would receive firm punishments on par with those received by adults (Bala et al., 2009). In contrast, first-time and non-serious offenders could escape the courts altogether. In this manner, according to Bala and his colleagues (2009), the YCJA can be considered a compromise between two political ideologies: treating young offenders more leniently while attending to serious concerns regarding youth violence. The Liberal government, which enacted the new legislation, hoped that the act could prevent first time and minor young offenders from becoming hardened criminals by diverting them to community-based programs. Diversion, or ‘extrajudicial measures’, were implemented in a manner that was more timely and appropriate for dealing with the delinquency of young people, with the hope that they would learn a sense of responsibility and become law-abiding citizens.

In the YCJA, the statement on sentencing declares that young people should be held accountable for their criminal behaviour using a sanction that has ‘meaningful consequences’ for the youth, one that aids in their rehabilitation, and ultimately ensures the long-term protection of the public. The Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. B.W.P* and *R. v. B.V.N* (2006) clarified that the term ‘meaningful consequences’ is not intended to promote a deterrence-style criminal justice approach, but rather one that is individually tailored to rehabilitate and reintegrate the young person into the community as a law abiding citizen (Reid, 2012).

Figure 2-4: UCR Youth Crime Rates between 1991 and 2014 including R^2 Trendlines



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

Likely as a result of extrajudicial measures and the use of diversionary tactics, Figures 2-3 and 2-4 show an immediate effect of the YCJA on youth crime and court rates. Figure 2-4 includes a representation of the early 1990s so the downward trend line can be viewed. Just prior to the introduction of the YCJA, as Figure 2-2 shows, there were slight increases in overall crime and violent crime; however, they appear to be anomalies as the overall trend between 1991 and 2014 was a decrease. While there was a reduction of 212.5 criminal charges per 100,000 in 2002 when compared to 2001, the drop seen in 2003 is considerably larger with 654.7 fewer youth being charged than the year prior. In 2003, the number of youth charged with violent offences fell by 148.7 per 100,000, which suggests that those who committed non-serious violent crimes, such as assault level 1, were given extrajudicial warnings by police as part of the YCJA's attempt to lower youths' unnecessary involvement with the criminal justice system. The police-reported crime rate shows an increase in 2007; however rates continue to decline after this momentary increase. According to Bell (2015), the most significant decline between 1986 and 2008 takes place during the first few years that the YCJA was active. Like the UCR statistics, the ICCS shows similar decreases with fewer young people appearing before the court (Figure 2-3).

While many in the criminal justice field viewed the use of extrajudicial measures and devotion to 'meaningful consequences' as a step in the right direction, not everyone viewed these changes as sufficient to 'protect' Canadians against young offenders. In 2012, the Conservative majority government amended the YCJA by passing the *Safe Streets and Communities Act* (SSCA). The SSCA altered the YCJA by adding the principle of 'deterrence' to youth sentencing and by placing the protection of society as a fundamental tenant. On the Department of Justice website (2011), it is stated in the backgrounder that the protection of society will be achieved by simplifying and reducing the barriers in order to keep youth incarcerated and by expanding the definition of "violent offence" to include any behaviour that might endanger others. Another change made by the SSCA is the ability for justice authorities to institute custodial sentences for those deemed to have a pattern of extrajudicial sanctions or guilty verdicts. Under the new act, the crown is required to consider adult sentences and lift the publication bans for

violent young offenders (“Backgrounder,” 2011). These changes give additional discretion to judges to assign harsher penalties for young people that break the law. Ultimately, these changes have the potential to drastically affect the way youth in Canada are treated within the criminal justice system.

It remains to be seen if these changes to the YCJA, which are largely ideological in nature, will result in crime and youth court rate increases as judges are still given the ability to interpret the act as they see fit, despite the inclusion of the ‘deterrence’ rhetoric respecting sentencing for young offenders.

2.6 Conclusion

Understandings and definitions of youth crime have changed drastically throughout the last several hundred years; however, the belief that something ought to be done about youth delinquency and crime is a sentiment that has remained constant since the nineteenth century. Wayward youth have alternatively been seen as in need of reform to live useful lives contributing to society, or criminals in need of incarceration and punishment. At times, they have been viewed as both simultaneously. Moral concerns may underlie both philosophies, but some believe youth can be reformed, while others emphasize punishment for wrongdoing.

The redefinition of childhood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries meant that immigrant and working class youth were pegged as deviant by members of the middle and upper classes for their visibility in cities as they struggled to earn a living. This led affluent reformers, with the mission to ‘save’ these youngsters from a life of immorality, to enact child protection laws and to place more stringent social controls on youngsters’ behaviours. The *Juvenile Delinquents Act* came out of the belief that working class young people in Canada could be ‘saved’ and rehabilitated to middle class behavioural standards of living. Rather than objectively identifying crimes for young people, the JDA instead served as a marker of middle class norms to guide youth away from so-called delinquency (Schissel, 2006; Tanner, 2010b; Trépanier, 1999a, 1999b). The numbers of

young people becoming entangled in the criminal justice system increased during this time, as working class and immigrant children were targeted for rehabilitation. While crime rates continued to fluctuate in the early twentieth century, by mid-century they were continually rising, leading many to question the effectiveness of the JDA. Not only did youth crime continue to grow after the implementation of the *Young Offenders Act* in 1984, the court and custody rates became so high that Canada became known as the country that incarcerated the most youth (Bell, 2012, 2015; Carrigan, 1991; O'Regan & Reid, 2012; Pate, 1999; Seiter, 2014; Trépanier, 1999a). The YOA was believed to provide a much-needed overhaul of the youth justice system and it sought to charge and prosecute young people with actual crimes rather than the violation of unwritten middle class morality codes. Further, the act sought more fairness in its execution. In reality, the legislation resulted in droves of young people charged with petty criminality and incarcerated. Minority youth and the poor were still over-represented in those prosecuted under the act.

The surge in youth crime in the late 1980s would be short lived, however, and crime rates began to decrease in the 1990s, which is a trend seen elsewhere in the Western world. *The Youth Criminal Justice Act* of 2003 demonstrated for criminal justice authorities that lowering the number of youth in criminal justice institutions was within their power by diverting young people away from the criminal justice system using extrajudicial measures. It remains to be seen what impacts the 2012 'tough on crime' approach found within the *Safe Streets and Communities Act* (SSCA) will have on youth crime and court trends. As the patterns reviewed in this chapter suggest, if the SSCA does result in more people behind bars, this might reflect an ideological shift, rather than a change in actual youth crime trends.

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Chapter 3

3 Are Canadian Girls Becoming More Violent? An Examination of Integrated Criminal Court Survey Statistics

3.1 Introduction

News stories over the last decade have paid considerable attention to youth crime, with many arguing it is on the rise. Particularly distressing to some is the supposed increase in crime amongst girls. A news editorial from the *Globe and Mail* entitled “Girls Gone Violent” suggests that Canada must start paying closer attention to the problem of girls’ violence because it has recently increased by 25% and the “vicious” nature of the girls’ attacks is also increasing (“Girls gone violent,” 2007, p. A16). Similarly, a *Toronto Star* article suggests that society should be wary of girls’ increasing gang membership (Edwards, 2006, p. B02).

Within the scholarly literature, consensus has not been reached about whether or not youth crime among boys and girls is increasing in quantity and severity. While some writers contend youth crime has increased, especially for girls (Artz & Nicholson, 2002; Artz, 1998), others are more skeptical and provide evidence of a decline in crime among girls (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2010; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Pate, 1999; Sprott & Doob, 2009). However, many of these latter studies were published almost a decade ago, and many look at rates before the passing of the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) in 2003, which altered approaches to youth crime. This paper updates and extends this literature by examining trends in youth crime, for both boys and girls separately between 1991 and 2012, to determine if the overall trends of violent crime convictions are increasing and what impact the YJCA has had on youth crime convictions. In this chapter, I also examine the ways in which statistics can be misused, misunderstood, and misconstrued to support various interpretations of youth crime in Canada.

3.2 Youth Crime Trends

Some scholars, journalists and Conservative politicians argue that that violence among young people is something to be concerned about (“9 key elements of the crime bill A guide to the federal government’s Safe Streets and Community Act,” 2011, “Backgrounder: Safe Streets & Communities Act: Protecting Society from Violent and Repeat Young Offenders,” 2011; Artz & Nicholson, 2002; Artz, 1998; Branch, 2015; Cohen, 1972, 2002; Kong & AuCoin, 2008; Moretti, Catchpole, & Odgers, 2005; Narine, 2013; Savoie, 2000). However, as we saw in chapter two, long-term crime and court data trends show no overarching increase in youth crime. Similarly, several Canadian scholars have identified a lessening of youth crime more generally since the introduction of the YCJA (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009; Bell, 2012; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004). For many, however, the real concern is about trends in girls’ rates of crime. As noted, media reports indicate girls have ‘gone violent.’ Some academics agree.

For instance, Artz (1998) argued that in the late 1990s there was little doubt among British Columbia-based educators and school administrators that girls were participating in violent crime at “alarming” rates⁴. She suggested that this trend of schoolgirl violence had surfaced in British Columbia, Ontario and throughout the United States. Artz (1998) supported her claims by citing provincial crime statistics showing that the number of girls charged with assault grew by 250% between 1986 and 1993 (p. 78). Her conclusions were based on interviews she completed with six girls between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. She found that the girls committing violent crime felt that their victims deserved violent attacks because they threatened relationships with adolescent boys.

A more recent overview published by the Public Health Agency of Canada similarly concludes that it is a myth that boys are more violent than girls, citing Justice Statistics to argue that in reality, more girls than ever before are being charged with violent crime and that their rates have actually tripled since the late 1980s and early 1990s (Artz &

⁴ Artz’s (1998) qualitative study on aggressive girls included interviews with only 6 aggressive girls; further research with larger sample sizes to confirm the results are representative of larger populations of girls is needed.

Nicholson, 2002). In a similar vein, Moretti, Catchpole, & Odgers (2005) use statistics provided by Savoie (2000) and Statistics Canada to show that the crime rates among Canadian girls have surged more than 127% between 1988 and 1998. Boys' rates, on the other hand, only increased 65% over the same period. Using these same statistics Moretti et al. (2005) contend that although boys' violence remains more serious, girls reach their violent peaks earlier than boys. Kong & AuCoin (2008) also suggest that while female youths take part in significantly less violent crime than boys, they peak at age fifteen while boys peak at age seventeen. Moretti et al. (2005) further argue that violent crime rates among boys have actually decreased slightly while girls' rates have shown modest growth (Moretti et al., 2005, p.22). Updated research from Moretti and her colleagues (2015) suggests that there have been increases since the 1980s in rates of youth violence, including violence and aggression among girls, but the rates have leveled off in recent years.

Not all authors agree that violence among girls is on the rise. Executive director of the *Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies* (CAEFS), Kim Pate (1999), alongside American scholars Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2008) contend that there have been no significant changes in the levels and patterns of girls' aggression and violence in Canada. In the late 1990s, Pate (1999) explained that oftentimes drastic increases in statistical rates of girls' violent crimes can be explained by the fact that historically there have been so few female offenders to begin with. For instance, if there were previously zero girls charged with robbery and over the past ten years there were two, it could be said that there was a 200% increase, making the surge seem much larger than it is (Pate, 1999, p.39). Pate (1999) also suggested that Statistics Canada data reveal that there was an overall reduction in youth crime at the end of the twentieth century and that generally speaking there was a low incidence of violent crime and recidivism by young offenders. Similarly, according to Youth Court Statistics from the 1990s, charges for murder and attempted murder by girls in Canada have also remained stable and have not increased (Reitsma-Street, 1999). According to Pate (1999), Statistics Canada data showed that overall the crime rate among youths is decreasing and that violence and repeat offending especially has remained relatively low throughout the 1990s (p. 40). To support such a claim, Schramm (1998) reveals that over the past 30 years, serious violent offences

committed by young women have gone down and that, of those women charged, 88% were charged with non-sexual simple assault. Doob and Sprott (1998) reiterate these sentiments by using data from the Youth Court Survey (YCS) to claim that the rate at which girls were charged remained stable and relatively low between 1991/92 and 1995/96. They also suggest that more serious forms of violent crime are more likely to be committed by male rather than female youth (Doob & Sprott, 1998).

Some scholars identify an upward trend in female youth crime in Canada, but hold that the increases are the result of a multitude of political and legislative factors. Between the 1980s and early 1990s, there was an increase in youth crime according to Reitsma-Street (1999). While she is not disputing the statistics, she does claim that this increase can be explained by various factors. The introduction of the Young Offenders Act in 1984 changed the upper age limit that defined youth in the justice system and also altered how Canada defined youth crime. Other reasons why crime rates increased during the 1990s, according to Reitsma-Street (1999), were that the overall number of youth in North America increased and that school administration, police and prosecutors altered the ways in which youth crime was typically handled. She explains that in the early 1980s, for every ten youths charged with a crime, one was female; twenty years later this gap had narrowed to one in every five being female. With the introduction of administrative offences (for example, breach of probation), girls began to rack up more charges. In 1986, 6.1% of the charges against Canadian girls were for administrative offences and this percentage rose steadily to 33.8% in the year 2000. While administrative charges have also been laid against boys, the percentages have not spiked so sharply (Reitsma-Street, 1999).

More recently, scholars have suggested that while the image of violent girls wreaking havoc on society may be a prominent vision within media portrayals, the reality could not be further from the truth (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; DeKeserdy, 2010; Sprott & Doob, 2009). American scholars Chesney-Lind & Irwin (2008) explain that news media has a tendency to highlight shocking cases of girls' violence in Canada, but that these incidents occur very rarely among girls. In comparison to male youth, self-reported data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) in 2003 showed

that for Canadian youth aged twelve to fifteen, girls report lower levels of property crime and violent crime than do boys. Likewise, the survey showed that amongst this age group, female youth reported less serious forms of violent crime than male youth (Fitzgerald, 2003). Similarly, Canadian scholars Sprott & Doob (2009) recently stated that in both Canada and the United States (as well as in other countries), girls are still less likely to appear in youth courts, and more likely to be involved in less serious types of criminality. The authors explain that if one were to look solely at court data, it would appear as though violent crime among girls has increased between the 1980s and the late 2000s; however the self-reported data they analyzed shows a decline.

Overall, the literature on youth crime, and especially girls' crime, has provided contradictory evidence, and few studies have documented trends into the twenty-first century. To address this gap in the literature this paper explores answers to three research questions. First, are youth becoming more violent in Canada? Second, how do youth crime rates change over time, and what is the impact of the YJCA on youth crime? Third, how do youth court conviction rates vary by gender? To do this, youth court convictions data (on guilty court findings) are analyzed for female and male youth in Canada between 1991/92 and 2011/12.

3.3 Methodology

To answer these questions, this research analyzes official governmental court statistics on crime involving Canadian youth found guilty of criminal offences, standardized for population and population growth, over time. Statistics Canada's Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) provides data on court trends between 1991/92 and 2011/12. The ICCS data will be compared with the Crime Severity Index (CSI) to gain a sense of whether or not the violent crimes recorded in youth court are becoming more serious in nature. The CSI tracks the severity of crime over time, while the ICCS provides data on the numbers of youth appearing in youth courts.

3.3.1 Data

3.3.2 The Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS)

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS) collects the ICCS data in conjunction with governmental departments responsible for criminal courts. Information from court dockets are forwarded to the CCJS for collation and calculation of statistics for the use of academics, analysts, justice authorities, media, and others (Statistics Canada, 2014).

The ICCS is intended to be a census, with a cross-sectional design, of both pending and completed federal statute charges that are heard in provincial/territorial and Canadian superior courts (Statistics Canada, 2014). The survey does not contain information on appeal courts, federal courts, or the Supreme Court of Canada. The goal of the survey (as part of the Courts Program) is to disseminate information on the Canadian court systems, including court appearances, charges, and cases in criminal courts, as they apply to both youth and adults. Aggregate data recorded include the “age and sex of the accused, case decisions, sentencing information regarding the length of prison and probation, and amount of fine, as well as case-processing indicators such as case elapsed time” (Statistics Canada, 2014). This aggregate data does not include individual case data.

According to Statistics Canada (2014), micro-data is extracted from administrative databases electronically using a software interface that rigorously tests the data to ensure data standards are met. Then, these data files are sent electronically to the CCJS according to a particular reporting schedule. The ICCS processing systems contain checks and balances to detect error: “an automated edit module ... examines all modules of incoming data for format and consistency” (Statistics Canada, 2014). All data are assessed for quality, and a yearly report is released. In this report, problems are highlighted and year-to-year comparisons of the data are conducted. Any records that contain missing key fields are rejected from the survey. Information on youth courts are available as of the year 1991/92.

The unit of analysis used for the ICCS is each case where a disposition of guilt was logged for a youth. Canadian court data include the following dispositions: guilty/conviction; acquittal; stayed, withdrawn, dismissed; or discharged. When youth are

charged with multiple offences during a single incident, the ICCS only includes the most serious charge, most serious decision, and most serious disposition. As a result, less serious charges, decisions, and dispositions are underrepresented in the sample (D. of J. Government of Canada, 2002).

Since my focus is on youth crime, I decided to focus only on those found guilty; focusing on charges would include youth who were found not guilty of committing a crime. While it is possible that young people can be found guilty of an offence when they are indeed innocent, a focus on guilty dispositions would appear to provide the most accurate measure of crime committed.

Youth was defined as those between the ages of 12 and 17 as this is the age range captured by the Young Offenders Act (YOA) and the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA). This categorization results in a slight underreporting of guilty violent offences in that there are a select few cases that likely were transferred to adult court. In 1996, the YOA was amended so that those aged 16 and older could be transferred to adult court in certain circumstances. Later, the YCJA amended this to the age of 14 (16 in Quebec) with some differences. Instead of being tried in adult court, a young person found guilty in youth court of an indictable offence could be sentenced as an adult while remaining in youth court. According to Hiebert (2010), this results in a possible underestimation of youth crime convictions for serious crimes, as the convictions of youth tried in adult court are not included in the data. The CCJS does not provide data on adult sentences under the YCJA (Statistics Canada, 2014).

3.3.2.1 Analysis of the ICCS

For the purposes of this paper, the ICCS was analyzed to reveal trends between 1991/92 and 2011/12 in total youth court conviction rates. The raw court numbers were converted into rates per 100,000 by using census data on youth populations for each year of the study. Court data were chosen because governmental statistics on youth crime from the Uniform Crime Report survey (UCR) cannot be separated by sex, whereas the ICCS data

can. While crime statistics obtained from Statistics Canada were utilized in Chapter two to analyze trends in youth crime, this chapter seeks a gender-specific approach. The year 1991/92 was chosen because this was the first year that youth court statistics are available. The 2011/12 end year was chosen as it is the most recent set of statistics available on youth courts; not all cases have been processed and completed for more recent years. Because I am interested in exploring the impact of the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA), passed in 2003, on youth crime trends, I pay particular attention to trends before and after the passing of the act.

The ICCS contains data on the numbers of individuals found guilty of committing different crimes in Canada. The ICCS separates the types of offences into various categories allowing a comparison of those crimes committed against persons, with those that are considered property, administration and traffic crimes. In this chapter, general crime rates refer to all offences committed by youth under federal statutes, excluding traffic offences. The various offence categories examined in this paper are summarized below.

3.3.2.2 Offence Categories in the ICCS

The category 'crimes against persons' includes all violent offences committed by those aged 12 to 17 within Canada that have gone to youth court. These violent crimes include the following: homicide, attempted murder, robbery, sexual assault, other sexual offences, weapons, major assault, minor assault, uttering threats, and criminal harassment. The category does not take into account the severity of the offence and also includes some crimes that are not typically characterized by physical violence but rather emotional or verbal aggression. The homicide category in the ICCS includes first and second-degree murder, manslaughter and infanticide. The category of major assault in the ICCS refers to those most serious types of assault that young people can be charged with: level 3/aggravated assault, level 2/assault with a weapon, or assault against a police officer. The minor or common assault category includes the least serious forms of assault

under the Criminal Code of Canada; these assaults are separated from more serious assaults in terms of the extent of physical injury.

The category of sexual assault in the ICCS includes sexual assaults that are both minor and major sexual violations of a person. This can include level 1 sexual assault that usually has minor physical injuries and sometimes the victim may not have physical injuries. Levels 2 and 3 can include weapons, threats, and bodily harm, maiming, disfiguring, and endangering the life of the victim. ‘Other sexual offences’ typically includes violations against children or animals that are sexual in nature (i.e., sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching, luring a child via a computer and sexual exploitation) (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Weapons offences are those where individuals have unauthorized weapons, ammunition or they are found guilty of carrying concealed weapons, pointing weapons, or carelessly storing their weapons. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, the offence of uttering threats includes threats against another’s life or threats concerning causing bodily harm. This offence can also include the threat of destruction of another’s property or killing of an individual’s animal. Criminal harassment is an interesting category within the ‘crimes against the person’ category since it includes a variety of behaviours, most of which do not include physical violence or weapons. Specifically, the criminal harassment category includes repeatedly following another, repeatedly communicating with someone directly or indirectly, besetting or watching a location frequented by another, or engaging in threatening conduct. When it comes to young people, these behaviours are frequently part of schoolyard and cyber bullying.

‘Property crimes’ were also investigated in this research and the crimes of theft, break and enter, fraud, mischief, possession of stolen property and the category of ‘other property crimes’ were examined. The component crimes (i.e., theft, break and enter...) were excluded from the results table as the primary focus of this chapter was violent crime. Each of these crime categories decreased over the time periods examined and it was believed that using the overarching heading of ‘property crime’ could capture the overall trend rather than describing each independently. Mischief is included in the table

below and generally refers to situations where someone destroys property or obstructs, interferes or interrupts the use of property. I included this category because news media frequently makes reference to youth being a nuisance or ‘up to no good’.

Administration of justice violations are crimes that occur when an individual fails to abide by sentences imposed by the courts or pre-trial conditions (Boyce, 2013).

According to the Statistics Canada (2015) website, administration of justice violations include failure to appear in court, breach of probation, being unlawfully at large, failing to comply with orders, and taking part in corruption and disobedience, misleading justice or committing perjury (S. C. Government of Canada, 2015a). Lastly, the possession of drugs was included as a variable. The *Controlled Drug and Substance* Act explains that the offence of drug possession includes those who have knowledge and control of a prohibited substance.

3.3.3 ICCS and Canadian Youth Population Changes

To obtain a clearer picture of trends over time, in this analysis ICCS statistics are standardized. Many news journalists and some criminologists have failed to identify population growth and reduction as factors shaping crime and court trends. Similarly, the ICCS does not take variations in the size of the youth population into consideration. An increase in absolute numbers of youth crime could simply reflect an increase in the number of youth in the population. For example, if one were to examine court convictions among young females between 1991/92 and 2002/03, it would appear as though convictions increased by 3%. The raw data shows that there were 10148 convictions in 1991/91 and 10461 in 2002/03 among female young offenders. However, these numbers do not take into account the fact that Canada’s population of female youths increased from 1,107,281 to 1,230,142 over this same period. When population growth is taken into consideration, and the rates of court convictions standardized per

100,000, the ICCS actually shows a 9% decrease.⁵ Changes in population over the years must be taken into account if crime statistics are to be interpreted accurately. By standardizing ICCS statistics to account for population changes, this research overcomes methodological limitations of past research, following the lead of criminology scholars like Doob and Sprott (1998) and Reitsma-Street (1999).

Youth population changes are summarized in Table 1.

Table 3-1: Youth population changes in Canada

	1991	2003	2010
Both Sexes	2,276,854	2,555,573	2,483,937
Male	1,169,573	1,311,992	1,271,668
Female	1,107,281	1,243,581	1,212,269

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Census of Canada

3.3.4 Crime Severity Index (CSI)

In addition to the ICCS, this study also draws on the Crime Severity Index (CSI) to obtain a more complete portrait of violent youth crime in Canada. The CSI allows the tracking of changes in the severity of police-reported crime between the years 1998 and 2009. The advantage of including both data sets is that I can then report on both the frequency and severity of crime. Claims that youth are more violent than in the past could be supported by evidence of increasing incidences of violent crime, or increased severity of crime. Unfortunately, CSI data are not available between the years of 1991 and 1997

⁵ The rate of female convictions was 767.01 per 100,000 in 1991/92 and 646.02 per 100,000 in 2002/03.

and hence are not fully compatible with YCS statistics. According to Statistics Canada, the CSI both complements and addresses some of the limitations of using official crime statistics on their own by providing a new measure to understand trends in criminal activity (Statistics Canada, 2009b).⁶

3.4 Results

I first examine the total crime convictions among youth between 1991/2 and 2011/12 for males and females and for the total sample. Figure 3-1 shows an overall decrease in the rates of youth found guilty in youth courts over this period. Rates for boys decline fairly steadily over time, while the girls' rates are flat initially before declining in 2002/3. Next, I focus specifically on violent crime to see how the results change. Figure 3-2 shows that violent crime processed in youth court increased between 1991 and 1997 and remained relatively stable until 2003, which was when the YCJA was enacted. After 2003, violent cases processed in youth court dropped sharply for a year or two, and then remained relatively stable over the next several years, decreasing again from 2009/10 to 2011/12. Thus, the overall trend in violent crime is a decrease, although the decrease is more modest than for total crime (in Figure 3-1). As Figure 3-2 shows, the trends for boys and girls are virtually identical to the overall trends, dropping after 2003. In neither Figure 3-1 nor Figure 3-2 is there evidence of an increase in youth guilty of criminal offences in youth court.

Table 3-2 presents the number and percentage change per 100,000 of total offences convictions over time broken down by types of crime and sex. Figures 3-1 and 3-2

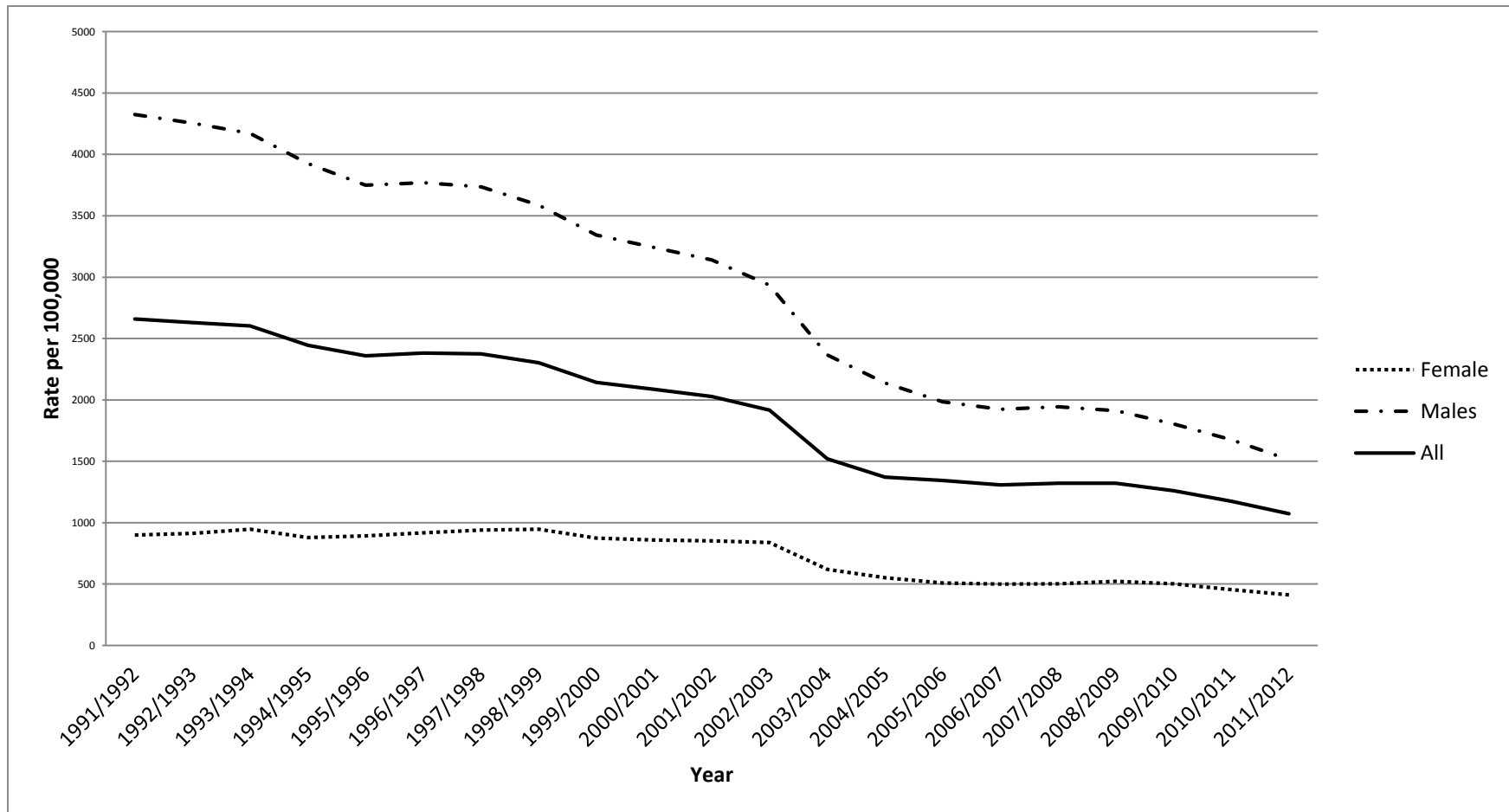
⁶ Other sources of crime statistics were also explored, but ultimately rejected because their methodological concerns were too great to overcome. For instance, the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) includes self-reported data on crime, however, the NLSCY was not representative after the fourth cycle for youth aged 12 to 17, rendering the data unreliable. In addition, the Self-Reported Delinquency survey from 2006 only surveyed youths in grades 7, 8 and 9 (roughly those aged 12-14) and hence lacks representation of those aged 15, 16 and 17. Thus, it was decided that the ICCS statistics would give the most accurate picture of youth crime in Canada.

provide an overall snapshot of total crime and violent crime convictions; however, Table 3-2 allows for a more specific analysis of various types of crime. Under each type of crime, the raw numbers, or all unstandardized convictions for the particular types of crime, are included in brackets for both sexes. The first three columns show the number of offences per 100,000 at three points in time: 1991/92, 2002/03, and 2011/12. By using 2002/03, rather than 2003/04, it is possible to see whether the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) influenced court convictions. Columns 4-6 present the percentage changes per 100,000 over three periods in time. Column 4 looks at the first period between 1991/92 and 2002/03. Column 5 looks at the second period between 2002/03 and 2011/12. And Column 6 shows the percentage change across the entire twenty-one year period (1991/92 and 2011/12).

Looking at the first section of the table, one can see that the total rate of youth offences per 100,000 has declined over the entire period. Both boys' rates and girls' rates have declined, and declines are evident between 1991 / 92 and 2002/03, and between 2002/03 and 2011/12. The ICCS data show a decrease of 60% for Canadian youth court convictions for total crimes, both violent and nonviolent. When separated by sex, the rate decreased by 65% for male youth and 54% for female youth. Although the rate of guilty court findings for boys decreased more than the rate among girls, boys took part in more crime during the entire period, as revealed by both the raw and standardized numbers of guilty court verdicts in columns 1,2, and 3.

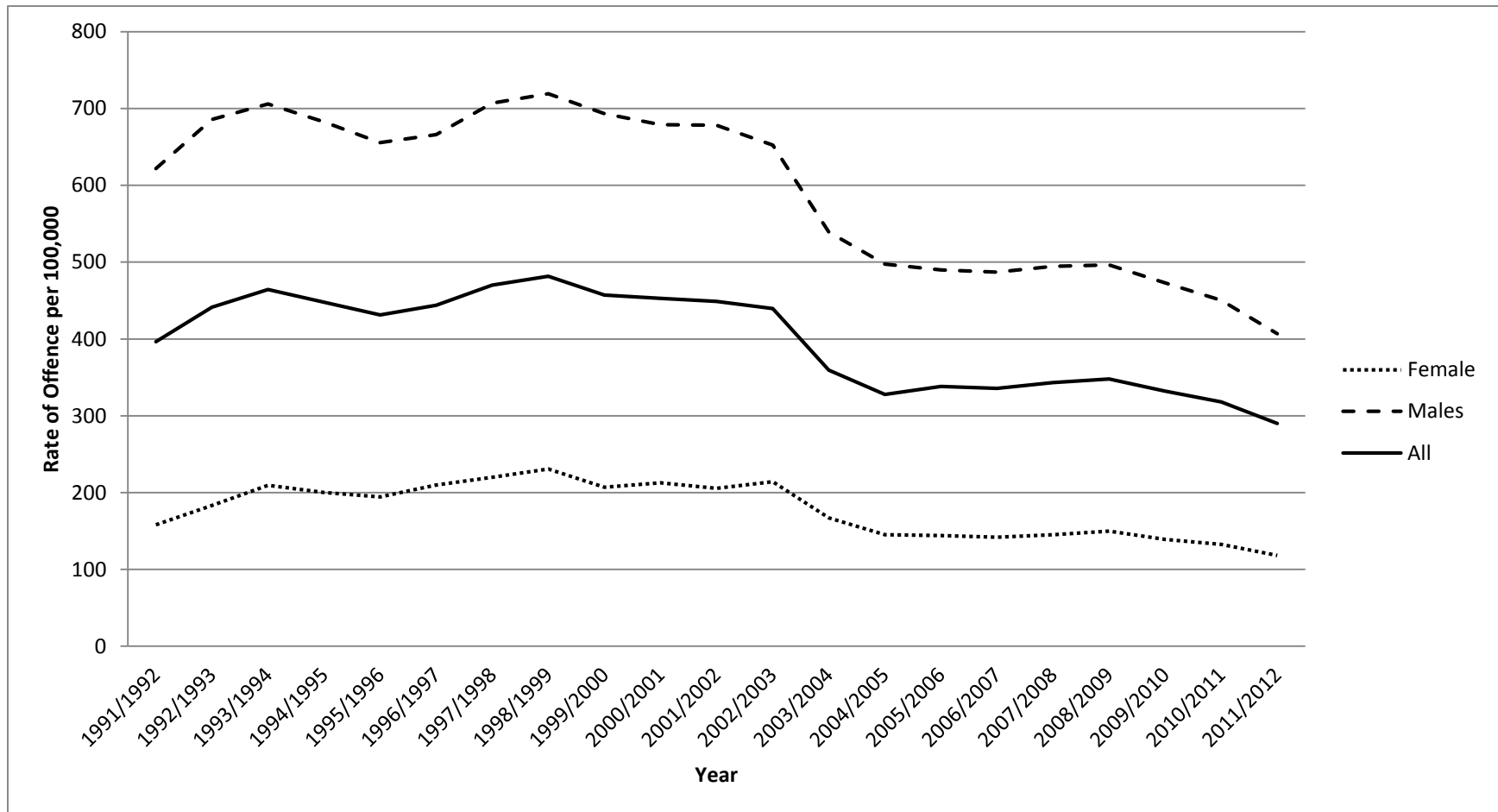
In the subsections that follow, I look more closely at these trends by era, by type of offence, and by gender. Emphasis will be placed on violent crimes, to assess whether there is any evidence that youth have become more violent over time, as many pundits proclaim. Property offences and other crimes will be included; however only those crimes that show increases will be discussed in detail. In Table 3-2, those rare occasions where youth crime has increased have been bolded. Raw numbers for each category are in brackets and represent the total guilty findings for all of Canada.

Figure 3-1: Line graph of total crime convictions in the ICCS data between 1991/92 & 2011/12 split by sex



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Integrated Criminal Court Survey

Figure 3-2: Line graph of violent crime convictions in the ICCS data between 1991/92 & 2011/12 split by sex



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Integrated Criminal Court Survey

Table 3-2: ICCS guilty youth crime findings and percentage changes per 100,000 between 1991/92 and 2011/12

Type of Crime	Number of youth offence convictions per 100,000			Percentage change per 100,000 between periods of time		
	[1] 1991/92	[2] 2002/03	[3] 2011/12	[4] 1991/92 - 2002/03	[5] 2002/03 - 2011/12	[6] 1991/92 - 2011/12
Total Offences⁷						
Both Sexes	2658.67 (60534)	1918.05 (48489)	1073.02 (26718)	-27.86%	-44.06%	-59.64%
Males	4324.48 (50578)	2935.62 (38101)	1513.5 (19365)	-32.12%	-48.44%	-65%
Females	899.14 (9956)	839.42 (10326)	411.4 (4980)	-6.64%	-50.99%	-54.25%
Crimes Against Persons- All violent offences						
Both Sexes	396.25 (9022)	439.63 (11114)	289.92 (7219)	10.95%	-34.05%	-26.83%
Males	621.77 (7272)	652.29 (8466)	406.8 (5295)	4.91%	-37.64%	-34.57%
Females	158.04 (1750)	214.04 (2633)	118.3 (1432)	35.43%	-44.73%	-25.15%
Homicide						
Both Sexes	1.23 (28)	0.75 (19)	1.04 (26) ⁸	-39.02%	38.67%	-15.45%
Males	2.05 (24)	1.16 (15)	1.17 (15)	-43.41%	0.86%	-42.93%
Females	0.36 (4)	0.33 (4)	0.17 (2)	-8.33%	-48.48%	-52.78%

⁷ This category includes all offences including both non-violent and violent crimes seen in Youth Court.

⁸ The raw ICCS data obtained from Statistics Canada for both sexes indicates that there were 26 guilty homicide findings, but does not indicate which sex was responsible for 9 of these cases.

Type of Crime	Number of youth offence convictions per 100,000			Percentage change per 100,000 between periods of time		
	[1] 1991/92	[2] 2002/03	[3] 2011/12	[4] 1991/92 - 2002/03	[5] 2002/03 - 2011/12	[6] 1991/92 - 2011/12
<i>Attempted Murder</i>						
Both Sexes	0.97 (22)	0.55 (14)	0.16 (4)	-43.30%	-70.91%	-83.51%
Males	1.62 (19)	0.85 (11)	0.23 (3)	-47.53%	-72.94%	-85.80%
Females	0.27 (3)	0.24 (3)	0.08 (1)	-11.11%	-66.67%	-70.37%
<i>Major Assault</i>						
Both Sexes	87.66 (1996)	105.93 (2678)	68.8 (1713)	20.84%	-35.05%	-21.51%
Males	139.45 (1631)	157.72 (2047)	89.49 (1145)	13.10%	-43.26%	-35.83%
Females	32.96 (365)	51.05 (628)	30.98 (375)	54.88%	-39.31%	-6.01%
<i>Common Assault</i>						
Both Sexes	166.68 (3795)	151.22 (3823)	82.13 (2045)	-9.28%	-45.69%	-50.73%
Males	229.57 (2685)	191.77 (2489)	101.37 (1297)	-16.47%	-47.14%	-55.84%
Females	100.25 (1110)	107.79 (1326)	52.54 (636)	7.52%	-51.26%	-47.59%
<i>Sexual Assault</i>						
Both Sexes	36.45 (830)	27.14 (686)	18.11 (451)	-25.54%	-33.27%	-50.32%
Males	69.51 (813)	51.39 (667)	32.59 (417)	-26.07%	-36.58%	-53.11%
Females	1.54 (17)	1.46 (18)	0.91 (11)	-5.19%	-37.67%	-40.91%
<i>Other Sexual Offences</i>						
Both Sexes	14.93 (340)	10.56 (267)	9.68 (241)	-29.27%	-8.33%	-35.16%

Type of Crime	Number of youth offence convictions per 100,000			Percentage change per 100,000 between periods of time		
	[1] 1991/92	[2] 2002/03	[3] 2011/12	[4] 1991/92 - 2002/03	[5] 2002/03 - 2011/12	[6] 1991/92 - 2011/12
Males	28.13 (329)	20.11 (261)	16.41 (210)	-28.51%	-18.40%	-41.66%
Females	0.99 (11)	0.49 (6)	0.91 (11)	-50.51%	85.71%	-8.08%
<i>Robbery</i>						
Both Sexes	56.44 (1285)	70.81 (1790)	58.03 (1445)	25.46%	-18.05%	2.82%
Males	98.24 (1149)	120.89 (1569)	88.71 (1135)	23.06%	-26.62%	-9.70%
Females	12.28 (136)	17.8 (219)	11.73 (142)	44.95%	-34.10%	-4.48%
<i>Weapons</i>						
Both Sexes	57.14 (1301)	46.83 (1184)	38.03 (947)	-18.04%	-18.79%	-33.44%
Males	104.31 (1220)	83.06 (1078)	58.93 (754)	-20.37%	-29.05%	-43.50%
Females	7.32 (81)	8.37 (103)	4.38 (53)	14.34%	-47.67%	-40.16%
<i>Uttering Threats</i>						
Both Sexes	19.76 (450)	61.23 (1548)	42.89 (1068)	209.87%	-29.95%	117.05%
Males	31.72 (371)	91.07 (1182)	61.82 (791)	187.11%	-32.12%	94.89%
Females	7.13 (79)	29.67 (365)	18.59 (225)	316.13%	-37.34%	160.73%
<i>Criminal Harassment⁹</i>						

⁹ Prior to 1996/97 there were no documented cases in Youth Court for the offence of criminal harassment and only one documented for '96/'97. The results in this table show the cases for 1997/98 rather than 1991/92.

Type of Crime	Number of youth offence convictions per 100,000			Percentage change per 100,000 between periods of time		
	[1] 1991/92	[2] 2002/03	[3] 2011/12	[4] 1991/92 - 2002/03	[5] 2002/03 - 2011/12	[6] 1991/92 - 2011/12
Both Sexes	2.58 (63)	3.96 (100)	2.81 (70)	53.49%	-29.04%	8.91%
Males	3.5 (44)	6.09 (79)	4.38 (56)	74%	-28.08%	25.14%
Females	1.6 (19)	1.71 (21)	1.07 (13)	6.87%	-37.43%	-33.13%
<i>Crimes Against Property</i>						
<i>All property offences</i>						
Both Sexes	1597.77 (36379)	791.05 (19998)	337.47 (8403)	-50.49%	-57.34%	-78.88%
Males	2658.66 (31095)	1242.02 (16120)	493.01 (6308)	-53.28%	-60.31%	-81.46%
Females	477.2 (5284)	313.78 (3860)	119.46 (1446)	-34.25%	-61.93%	-74.97%
<i>Mischief</i>						
Both Sexes	148.63 (3384)	111.43 (2817)	58.47 (1456)	-25.03%	-47.53%	-60.66%
Males	259.84 (3039)	179.91 (2335)	88.86 (1137)	-30.76%	-50.61%	-65.80%
Female	31.16 (345)	38.94 (479)	18.92 (229)	24.97%	-51.41%	-39.28%
<i>Administration of Justice</i>						
Both Sexes	202.74 (4616)	184.29 (4659)	127.59 (3177)	-9.10%	-30.77%	-37.07%
Male	307.55 (3597)	264.58 (3434)	156.47 (2002)	-13.97%	-40.86%	-49.12%
Female	92.03 (1019)	99.26 (1221)	67.91 (822)	7.86%	-31.58%	-26.21%

Type of Crime	Number of youth offence convictions per 100,000			Percentage change per 100,000 between periods of time		
	[1] 1991/92	[2] 2002/03	[3] 2011/12	[4] 1991/92 - 2002/03	[5] 2002/03 - 2011/12	[6] 1991/92 - 2011/12
<i>Drug Possession</i>						
Both Sexes	29.34 (668)	67.09 (1696)	35.86 (839)	128.66%	-46.55%	22.22%
Male	49.93 (584)	115.34 (1497)	59.48 (761)	131.00%	-48.43%	19.13%
Female	7.59 (84)	15.93 (196)	7.85 (95)	109.88%	-50.72%	3.43%

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Integrated Criminal Court Survey

3.4.1 Violent Crimes

For the purposes of this discussion, violent crimes include all crimes against persons including homicide, attempted murder, major assault, common assault, sexual assault, other sexual offences, robbery, offences with weapons, uttering threats and criminal harassment. In Table 3-2, the section under the heading “Crimes against Persons” shows the total trends for all violent offences. Column 4 shows an increase in rates of violent guilty findings for all youth between 1991/92 and 2002/03. Rates increased 11% overall, 5 % for boys and 35% for girls. However, in the subsequent period, 2002/03 to 2011/12, rates of violent crime decreased, as column 5 shows. The overall effect, across the entire period, is illustrated in column 6: a decrease in overall rates of violent youth convictions by 27%. The decline in violent crime rates holds for both boys and girls: the decreases are approximately 35% and 25% respectively.

The decline in overall rates of violent crime convictions reflects, by and large, trends for many specific offences. Homicide, arguably the most serious form of violence one can be convicted for, also decreased across the entire period. However, the main decreases were witnessed between 1991/2 and 2002/3. Overall youth homicide rates, and boy’s rates increased slightly between 2002/03 and 2011/12. Girls’ homicide rates continued to

decline across this period. Few Canadian youth commit homicide, and hence this category can see substantial percentage shifts, with small numerical changes.

As Table 3-2 shows, rates of attempted homicide declined across the entire period, as did the rates for common assault for the most part. Major assault increased in the first part of the period (1991/2 to 2002/3) for both boys and girls, before falling in the subsequent period. The overall trend was a decrease of 22% over the full 21-year period, with boys seeing greater declines than girls (36% and 6% respectively). It should be noted that although boys' rates fell more dramatically, their guilty findings in the major assault category amounted to 101 per 100,000, while girls' rates were 31 per 100,000. Sexual assault rates also decreased in each time category and specifically by 50% during the total time period examined. 'Other' sexual offences increased by almost 86% between 2002/03 and 2011/12; however looking at the raw data, the large statistical jump is the result of five more girls being convicted of this offence across all of Canada. Weapons offences decreased over time despite a small increase in girls' weapons offences between 1991/2 and 2002/3, which was followed by a decline between 2002/3 and 2011/12. In contrast, robbery offences fluctuated, increasing between 1991/2 and 2002 and decreasing between 2002/3 and 2011/12. The net effect was a small overall increase in robbery convictions.

While most rates of violent guilty findings decreased over the period, the rates for uttering threats and criminal harassment have increased substantially. The long-term trend shows that between 1991/92 and 2011/12, those found guilty of uttering threats increased by 117% (95% for boys and 161% for girls). Again, although the percentage change for girls is higher, they are charged less often than are boys for uttering threats and the raw numbers remained small. The increase in youth convicted of uttering threats is the single largest increase observed over this period. Criminal harassment guilty verdicts also increased generally over the period. Prior to 1996/97, no youth were found guilty of criminal harassment and in this year, only one boy in all of Canada was found guilty of this offence. In 1997/98, there were 63 youths in Canada found guilty of this offence. It was decided to use 1997/98 as the base year, since this provided a more realistic starting point. Starting from zero or one results in exaggerated percentage changes (for instance, 7000%). Thus, column 4 represents the percentage change (per

100,000) between 1997/98 and 2002/03 and column 6 represents the percentage change (per 100,000) between 1997/98 and 2011/12. As column six shows, the increase between 97/98 and 2011/12 was 9%. The number of youths found guilty of this crime is fairly small, so that small numerical increases result in significant percentage increases. For instance, there were 7 more youths per 100,000 found guilty of criminal harassment in 2011/12 than in 1997/98. Although there was a 9% increase in girls found guilty of this offence between 1997/98 and 2002/03, the long-term trend is downward, with a reduction of 33% between 1997/98 and 2011/12.

The observed increases in guilty findings for uttering threats and criminal harassment, suggest there may have been policing changes during this period that resulted in greater numbers of girls and boys being charged. It may not be the case that there was a substantial increase in criminal behaviour in this era, but rather certain youth behaviours may have been defined as criminal over the period. Zero-tolerance for bullying in schools, and anti-bullying legislation, may have resulted in the observed increases within this crime category. I discuss this more in the discussion section.

Overall, the data reveal a downward trend in youth crime for both boys and girls after the introduction of the YCJA, despite increases between 1997/98 and 2011/12 for the crimes of uttering threats and criminal harassment. Additionally, Table 3-2 shows how some increases in violent crime may appear to be major; however, raw figures indicate that the high percentage jumps are reflective of small numbers.

3.4.2 Non-Violent Crimes

As shown in Table 3-2 (see Crimes Against Property heading), non-violent crimes committed by youth generally declined between 1991/92 and 2011/12. Long-term trends between 1991/92 and 2011/12 for all property crimes show an overall decrease of 79%. Both boys and girls experienced this decrease. Looking at the various subcategories we can see that rates for mischief and administration of justice also decreased across the entire period by 61% and 37% respectively. There were small increases in the rates of

girls' convictions for these two crimes between 1991/92 and 2002/03. The increase of 25% in girls convicted of mischief reflects only about 7 more girls per 100,000. These small increases were offset by subsequent declines. The only category of non-violent crime to demonstrate an increase during this period was drug possession convictions which increased by 22% for Canadian youth overall; boys experienced an increase of 19%, while girls experienced an increase of only 3%. This means that roughly 0.3 more girls and 10 more boys were found guilty of this offence in 2011/12 compared to 1991/92.

3.4.3 Assessing the Impact of the YJCA

Overall rates of youth crime were in decline before the YCJA was implemented, and they continued to decrease after the act was passed. However, there is evidence that rates for violent crime committed by youth increased in the years before the YCJA, only to decline subsequently. Looking at the trends subsequent to 2002/03, only overall homicide rates, and girls' other sexual offences increased. Even 'uttering threats' convictions decreased in this period, compared to the previous era. Thus, with respect to violent crime, it appears that the YJCA may have resulted in a decrease in youth convictions. The trend is similar when looking at property crimes. All non-violent crimes depicted in Table 3-2 decreased between 2002 / 03 and 2011/12.

Thus, the introduction of the YCJA appears to have influenced the ways in which young offenders were processed, resulting in more young people receiving extrajudicial measures and sanctions. One of the fundamental goals of the YCJA was to divert first time, petty offenders from the criminal justice system when possible. Hence, fewer youths may have entered the courts in the first place. The result was a decline in the numbers of those found guilty in youth court for the total offences category, and most other categories. Although the decline in youth conviction rates subsequent to the YCJA is striking, it is nonetheless true that, for many offences, youth crime was already declining.

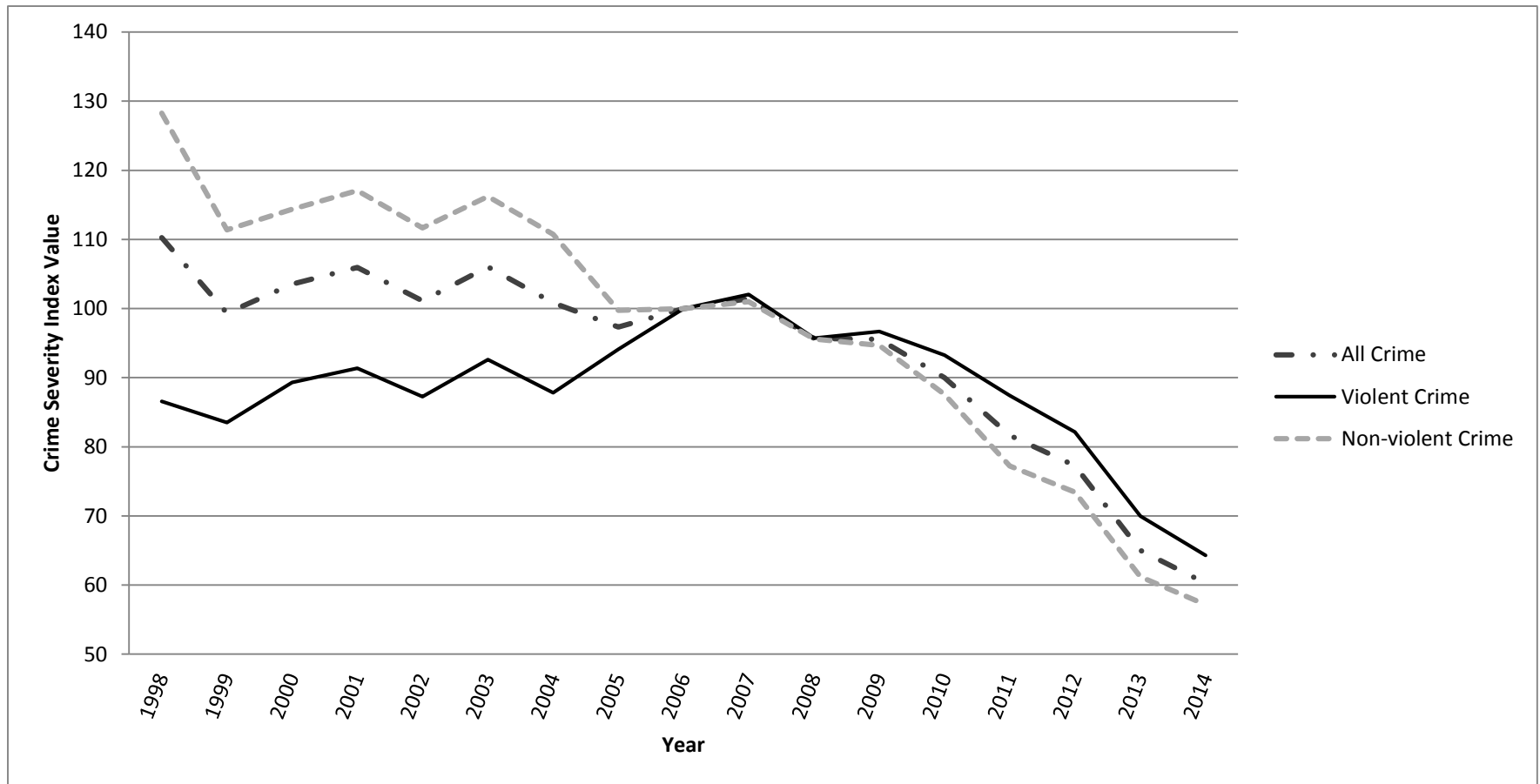
3.4.4 Crime Severity

The previous analysis shows a general decline over time in youth crime convictions. Nevertheless, occasionally in the media, articles claim that even though rates of youth crime are decreasing, the severity of youth crime is increasing. For instance, in a *National Post* article on girls and aggression, a deputy minister with the Ministry of Children and Family Development suggests that even though crime rates among girls have been decreasing since the 1990s, “[y]outh violence has always been with us [and that] what has concerned us is the ethics of fighting and the intensity. To say youth violence numbers have come down, doesn't mean we no longer need to be concerned and vigilant” (Dickson, *The National Post*, 2005). These types of statements lead one to question, are today's young offenders more extreme than their predecessors? I now turn to an analysis of the Crime Severity Index (CSI) to answer this question. As mentioned previously, the CSI tracks the severity of police-reported crime and takes into consideration changes in the incidence of a particular crime as well as its seriousness when compared to other types of crime (Statistics Canada, 2009b). A limitation of this index is that it looks at all youth generally and does not distinguish between crimes committed by males and females. For this analysis, I consider three categories. The first includes all offences committed by young people in Canada. The second includes only violent offences, and the third only property offences. Figure 3-3 shows CSI trends between 1998 and 2014 (with 2006 as the base year).

In Figure 3-3, the biggest decline is in non-violent crime; severity rates decline fairly steadily across the entire period. The drop is fairly consistent after 2003, with a more rapid decline following 2007. In contrast, the index for all crime remains fairly flat, and then decreases from 2007 on. Violent crime severity increased slightly between 1998 and 2007, especially between 2004 and 2007. Since 2007 it has declined. The year 2013 witnessed the largest decrease in severity when compared to 2012 for all crime, violent crime, and non-violent crime.

Statistics Canada CSI data, does not support arguments that youth crime is becoming more severe. There was some limited evidence that severity increased between 1998 and 2007, for violent crimes only, but decreases in crime severity have occurred since 2007.

Figure 3-3: Youth CSI between 1998 and 2014 split by crime type



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Crime Severity Index

3.5 Discussion and Conclusion:

Media reports frequently argue that today's youth are more violent, and more likely to engage in criminal activity than in the past. To ascertain if this was the case, I conducted detailed analyses of ICCS and CSI statistics on youth crime. A close look at crime trends showed youth are not becoming more violent in Canada. Indeed, ICCS data indicate that rates of both violent crime as a whole, and specific violent offences, are decreasing amongst Canadian youth. Further, the CSI data suggest that the severity of youth crime has also decreased; however, there is evidence that the severity of violent crimes committed by youth had increased prior to 2007. In a similar vein, the ICCS data indicate that some forms of violent crime – specifically major assault, robbery, uttering threats and criminal harassment – increased during the 1990s. After the passage of the YCJA, however, there are signs that all forms of violent youth crime, except for homicide, decreased. The percentage increase for homicide appears large at almost 39% (per 100,000) between 2002/03 and 2011/12, yet the raw numbers indicate it was a difference of five cases and the overall rate for the twenty-one years examined has decreased. These trends not only challenge common depictions of youth crime, but also suggest that the YCJA has met its goal of keeping youth out of custody, and diverting minor infractions away from the courts. This finding supports the results of Bala, Carrington and Roberts (2010) who found that the YCJA has resulted in decreases in the use of youth courts and youth custody for non-serious offences (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2010). In contrast, serious youth offenders have been given sentences comparable to adults (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2010).

This analysis also sought to determine how rates of youth crime vary by gender. Some media reports suggest girls are increasingly approaching, or outdoing, their male counterparts, and engaging in violent crimes like never before. ICCS data indicate that rates of girls' crime are consistently below boys' rates, and the trends for boys' and girls' crime are the same. Both have experienced decreases. The rates of change for boys and girls are different (and occasionally occur in opposite directions). Differential rates, however, simply reflect the low levels of crime committed by girls. There is no evidence that girls are out of control.

Although the trends in youth crime are fairly consistent across crime and gender, there are some outliers, which deserve attention. Most notable are the increases in the number of youth charged with uttering threats since the early 1990s, and to a lesser extent, an increase in convictions for criminal harassment. It seems likely that these increases reflect legislative change, and changing attitudes and police practices towards certain youth behaviours. For instance, Ontario's Safe Schools Act and Regulations came into effect in 2001 to target school-based violence. As a result, minor forms of violence and relational aggression -- that would have been formerly ignored -- have been brought to the youth court's attention (Doob & Sprott, 1998). The main purpose of these "zero tolerance" policies, which began in the mid-1990s, was to limit the discretionary power of principals and school officials when it came to behaviour that was considered harmful to other students, and to require mandatory suspension or expulsion. Prior to the adoption of these types of policies, principals used their discretion and could institute different forms of punishment, which included expulsion. Further, the "emergence of bullying as a social problem" has been cited by Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2008) as a moral panic in North America with many worrying about the violence and aggression of school-aged youth. These authors suggest that bullying used to be considered a normal part of growing up but is now being perceived as a form of deviance that must be addressed.

Criminal harassment was not even included in the ICCS until 1996. Before this, youth might have been charged with intimidation, uttering threats, mischief, indecent or harassing phone calls, trespassing at night and breach of recognizance. In many cases, these behaviours may not have been criminalized at all. Criminal harassment in its current form includes stalking, cyber-stalking and online harassment. The rise in criminal harassment and uttering threat charges among girls may be due to the moral panic and zero tolerance policies within Canadian schools to prevent bullying.

Some scholars critique this change, and especially its potential impact on girls. For Chesney-Lind (2006), the change is part of 'the feminist backlash.' She explains that in the current political era, the right-wing has used the "crime problem" to erode the rights of both women and people of colour through law and criminal justice policies. For instance, any behaviour that threatens the dominant systems of power can motivate

various types of social control tactics. For Chesney-Lind and others, anti-bullying legislation treats all forms of youth bullying similarly (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). When it comes to criminal activity, it is not uncommon for girls and boys to stay true to their socially constructed gender scripts. When girls take part in criminal activity, they do so in a way that allows them to live up to some norms of femininity (Messerschmidt 1997). For instance, Chesney-Lind & Irwin (2008) state that typically girls take part in what is called 'relational aggression' which includes emotionally hurtful behaviours like eye-rolling, talking about other girls, excluding others, joking about the appearance or clothing of other girls, spreading rumours and sarcasm (Chesney-Lind et al., 2010). Boys on the other hand, may commit crime in a manner that reinforces norms of masculinity (Messerschmidt, 1993). Boys' bullying tends to be more physical, and is more likely to include direct violence. Although the behaviours girls take part in are generally non-violent, they still get caught up in the zero-tolerance bullying policies and ultimately find their way into the criminal justice system (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). It is argued that the conflation of these very distinct forms of bullying is resulting in unfair punishments for girls since their forms of bullying often do not include physical violence (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008).

This study has explored rates of crime amongst boys and girls, but it could not explore differences in the severity of crimes committed by boys and girls. This would be a topic worthy of future research. Future research should also explore the charging of youth in adult court. It is, of course, possible that some of the declines witnessed for youth crime are offset by an increase in youth charged in adult court. If this is the case, then it would likely hold only for the most severe crimes such as homicide. Further, it would go against the general trend in youth crime. Lastly, more research is also needed on changes in criminal harassment convictions and uttering threats, since these are the only areas in which increases in youth crime are evident. As noted, gender differences in these crimes are worthy of particular attention.

Overall, there is reason to question media claims about youth crime. The statistics presented in this paper highlight the ways that statistics can be misused or misinterpreted with large percentage increases and decreases being reflective of only a handful of

criminal guilty findings. Academics should continue to dispel myths by contextualizing statistics in an attempt to provide an alternative representation of young offenders, including girls, in Canada. As ideologies change, research will be needed to reflect upon how legislative changes influence youth crime and court trends. With the 2012 passing of the Safe Streets and Communities Act (SSCA), which aimed to take a tougher approach when dealing with young offenders, it remains to be seen if this new ideological structure has or will influence trends. Future research should examine what impact this piece of legislation has on youth crime and court trends in Canada. If Canadians do see more youth entering the court systems as a result of the SSCA, this increase may not reflect a rise in criminal behaviour, but rather a change in how youth crime is prosecuted. The ‘get tough on crime’ approach may steer more youth into the criminalization web.

3.6 References

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Chapter 4

4 Youth Crime and Depictions of Youth Crime in Canada: Are News Depictions Purely Moral Panic?

4.1 Introduction

While some Canadians may have experienced crime by being a victim, witness, or perpetrator, most Canadians learn about crime through media reports on national and local youth crime trends and high profile criminal cases. Lurid stories and depictions of youth crime and young offenders within popular media have served as fodder to fuel the negative attention that young people receive (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Critcher, Hughes, Petley, & Rohloff, 2013; DeKeserdy, 2010; Jewkes, 2015; Krinsky, 2008a; Schissel, 1997, 2008; Springhall, 2008; Tanner, 2001, 2010; Terrio, 2008; K. Thompson, 1998, 2013; Welch, Price, & Yankey, 2002). The appeal of crime stories involving those of all ages ensures their prevalence in every type of mass media, whether audio, print, or visual. Crime and deviance among young people, however, tend to fascinate and disturb the public in ways potentially unmatched by most forms of adult criminality.

In this regard, scholars have highlighted the ways media often exaggerate and sensationalize crime in the western world (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind, 1999; Critcher et al., 2013; DeKeserdy, 2010, 2010; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Faith, 2011; Faucher, 2007; Giles, 1946; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Jewkes, 2004; Krinsky, 2008b; Males, 2010; Sangster, 2002; Schissel, 2006; Sprott, 1996; Tanner, 2001, 2010; K. Thompson, 1998; Welch et al., 2002). Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the media's portrayal of crime rates and crime offers an objective assessment of real-world social problems, a sensationalized reflection of real-world trends, or whether it signals a moral panic surrounding youth crime. The purpose of the analysis presented in this chapter is to examine newspaper accounts of youth crime in comparison to official youth crime statistics and to determine whether, and to what extent, they align.

4.2 News Reports & Moral Panics

Since the times of the town crier, societal events have been of paramount concern to citizens, and news media outlets have capitalized on sensational depictions of crime. In the modern era, the public has constant access to the news via newspapers, online news sources, social media and radio broadcasting. Despite the changing news platforms, news outlets are still driven by the age-old mantra “if it bleeds, it leads” (Tewksbury, Miller, & DiMichele, 2006). The use of sensationalistic crimes to sell newspapers or obtain ‘shares’ and ‘likes’ on social media becomes a concern when one recognizes that much of the public’s information regarding crime and deviance comes from sources that are attempting to derive profit.

Critical criminologists since the 1960s and 1970s have examined media depictions of crime and criminality and have highlighted how select crimes and certain offenders receive a disproportionate amount of the criminal justice and media attention. Schissel (2006) finds evidence of a ‘moral panic’ in depictions of youth crime due to the exaggerated focus on stereotypical and inaccurate portrayals of young people and their involvement with deviant behaviour. For Stanley Cohen (2002), a moral panic exists when a phenomenon’s reality has been distorted and exaggerated when compared to more reliable and objective sources. This process is exacerbated when the social problem in question becomes equated with more serious epistemic realities within society (i.e., student truancy becoming equated with criminality).

Cohen (1972) first used the term ‘moral panic’ (or ‘deviancy amplification’) in relation to his observations of “mods” and “rockers” in the 1960s and 1970s. The mods and rockers were two opposing groups of young people in Britain and on Easter Sunday of 1964 nearly one hundred youth were arrested when windows were broken, rocks were thrown, beach huts were damaged, and several scuffles broke out, all while motorbikes and scooters noisily drove up and down the streets (Cohen, 1972, 2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, 2009). Rather than portraying the incident as an occurrence that was bizarre and rare, media reported the incident in wildly fantastical language suggesting that youth mob violence and vandalism posed a serious threat to British ways of life. The issue of mob violence remained a prominent social concern as media, the police, the

public, politicians, and other organizations perpetuated the myth that youth mob violence and vandalism were major phenomena, when in reality these types of crimes were unusual (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

In this case and others, journalists and other authorities created ‘folk devils’, defined as “deviant stereotypes identifying the enemy, the source of the threat, selfish, evil wrongdoers who are responsible for the trouble” (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). In Cohen’s (1972) example, groups of young people became ‘mobs’ that threatened British society. In the creation of folk devils, language and imagery are used to suggest a phenomenon is especially dangerous and threatening (Schissel, 2006). ‘Moral barricades,’ such as justice authorities and media cast these folk devils as “personifications of evil” (Schultz, 2008). The result, according to Schultz (2008) is a limited and fixed political imagination when it comes to the trueness of the social problem and how to go about fixing it.

Traditionally, the concepts of ‘folk devils’ and ‘moral panics’ were equated and snugly fit within labeling theory; however, in the current era, they are typically enveloped in the social constructionist and claims-making literatures (Cohen, 2002). Social constructivists suggest that definitions of crime and criminality are contingent upon time and space and thus, constructed. The viewpoint that crime is a social construction implies that definitions of crime, and thus reactions to criminality, can shift and change depending on social structures. Even in one specific geographic location, such as Canada, understandings of deviant behaviour are far from static. Crime, legislation, and public social concerns are grounded in evolving social structures, and deeply entrenched systems of power and inequality. As discussed in previous chapters, the classification of youth and child behaviours as either youthful indiscretions or criminal activity has shifted, and continues to shift, since before the development of the first piece of youth criminal justice legislation in the early 1900s. The beliefs held by adults and criminal justice authorities have varied in accordance with political and ideological norms on how youth ‘ought’ to behave and what their civic roles should be. Similarly, social understandings of the causes of criminal behaviour and appropriate punishments for deviant youth have changed and continue to do so.

The term ‘moral panic’ was used by Cohen and other social constructivists to posit that the reactions of media, politicians, police, the public, and other interested parties to certain situations or people is far beyond what is reasonable (Ben-Yehuda, 1986; Cohen, 1972, 2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, 2009; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Krinsky, 2008b; Schissel, 1997, 2006, 2008; Schultz, 2008).

Specifically, Cohen (1972, p. 9) states:

[a] condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself.

Hall and his colleagues (1978) expanded and added to the concept of a moral panic to include Marxian interpretations of experience and consciousness. This expansion allows for an understanding of how the ‘moral panic’ itself becomes a surface manifestation of a more “deep-seated historical crisis” within capitalist societies (Hall et al., 1978). Moral panics act as “diversionary manifestations, intended to maintain the status quo, of a continuing historical crisis” (Krinsky, 2013). While this particular study does not involve examinations of Canada as a capitalist society per se, critical theories or interpretations of moral panics are integral as they can help us to understand the reification of dominant hegemonic structures. Classical crime control ideologies and reductionist beliefs surrounding the causes and solutions of crime contribute to our understanding of the status quo as it relates to young people and delinquency (Bell, 2015; O’Regan & Reid, 2012; Reid, 2012; Seiter, 2014). Traditional crime control beliefs hold that crime is a result of societal breakdown, social change, and a lack of adequate forms of social control with crime being a supposedly natural outcome (O’Regan & Reid, 2012; Reid, 2012). As

discussed in chapter 2, the behaviours of members of the working class and the poor are defined as deviant, and as potential threats to the social order. Thus, the poor and disadvantaged can be demonized as ‘folk devils’ and become the focus of negative attention during moral panics.

Inherent in moral panics is a social control element: there is a sense that something ‘ought’ to be done to fix the problem and oftentimes this means a moral reconfiguring of society (Schissel, 2006). Various types of crime and social phenomena are repeatedly described as new and alarming (Welch et al., 2002). Attempts to persuade the public that a nostalgic past exists, free from contemporary concerns, are common within the monologues of a moral panic, and they help to solidify the belief that a particular social problem warrants and justifies punishment. Social gatekeepers, such as justice authorities and media, may advocate for policy changes to control those demonized as folk devils (Cohen, 1972, 2002; Schultz, 2008). Moral panics can distort real-life trends and alter the public’s perceptions of crime, potentially having a significant, negative, impact on policy formation (Jewkes, 2004; Tewksbury et al., 2006).

Many moral panics focus on youth. What makes depictions of youth crime unique in comparison to crime committed by adults is that young people have already been constructed and viewed as ‘problems’ with each generation vilifying the next. Previous scholarly literature has argued that when youth are shown in news representations, they are more often depicted as perpetrators of crime, rather than as victims or actors responding to problematic contexts (Wayne, Henderson, Craig, & Petley, 2008). When the public imagines youth, the first thing to come to their minds is the perception of ‘risk’ (K. Thompson, 1998, 2013). Not only are youth a source of risk, they are simultaneously viewed as ‘at risk’ as well. Thompson (1998) suggests that this is due to their transitional status, which places them outside the dichotomous categories of childhood and adulthood. The exclusionary categorizations of personhood results in difficulty placing youth on the “continuum between work and play,” leading to uncertainty regarding how far along youth are in the process of becoming full citizens with complete civic participation (Schissel, 2006). Instead of highlighting the reality that young people are particularly vulnerable members in society, they are constructed as being a menace to the

prevailing social order. Just as Britney Spears sang in her 2001 hit “I’m not a girl, not yet a woman,” youth occupy a particular space in between childhood and adulthood making it difficult for classifications to be made regarding their societal responsibility. This transitory youthful state, which all young people at one point find themselves in, can be perceived as particularly dangerous and risky within public discourse (C. Y. Thompson, Young, & Burns, 2000). Similarly, social surveys in Canada have shown, time and time again, young people receive the most negative attention and are consistently viewed as troublesome or troubling (Tanner, 2001, 2010). The vilification of youth is intensified for young people of colour due to Canada’s history with colonialism and racism.

The current assumption taken up in Canadian mass media is that youth are behaving in ways never seen before and that youth crime is spiraling out of control (Faith, 2011; Schissel, 2006; Tanner, 2001, 2010). However, official data suggest that crime amongst youth is actually decreasing. This study uses a social constructionist perspective to analyze this contradiction, by focusing on trends in youth crime statistics and news media accounts. Studies which examine the portrayals of crime, criminality and responses to crime are important to help deconstruct the messages, themes, trends, ideologies and understandings of criminality that are being delivered to the general public. In this paper, two research questions are explored: (1) does the quantity of news articles about youth crime or youth violence vary in accordance with youth crime rates? For example, does media attention decrease as crime rates decrease? (2) What else might account for changes in the numbers of Canadian news stories written on youth crime from year to year? Is there evidence of a moral panic surrounding youth crime in Canadian newspapers?

In light of the literature on moral panics and media accounts, it was expected that there would be no relationship between the crime trends and the number of news articles published on youth crime over the last few decades.

4.3 Methodology

This study analyzes youth crime statistics and trends in newspaper publications on youth crime to ascertain the extent to which the two co-vary between 1991 and 2014. The Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) was used for this chapter; however the analyses (described below) were initially conducted using both the UCR and the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS). Each analysis yielded similar findings, and so the use of both was deemed redundant. Statistics Canada charging data from the UCR was used to assess young peoples' involvement with the criminal justice system: included in the study are those young people between the ages of 12 and 17 who were charged by justice authorities. Charge rates may be shaped by police practices, and are not necessarily a perfect reflection of crime trends. Nevertheless, media often report on individuals charged with crimes, so charge rates were seen to be a good source of data for the present analysis. Three categorizations of crime were used: total crime trends (all crimes including crimes against property and crimes against persons, but excluding traffic), crimes against property (non-violent), and crimes against the person (violent). Thus, the UCR data used here include all youth charged with violent or non-violent crimes (excluding traffic) between 1991 and 2014. The end date was chosen to ensure the analysis was as up-to-date as possible.

The newspaper data are drawn from three Canadian newspapers: *The Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Toronto Star* (see Table 4-1). These news outlets were chosen for this study because they are widely read, highly accessible, and easy to search. These particular newspapers are Canada's only national newspapers, and each has an "agenda-setting influence" as well as a wide circulation (Johnson, Henderson, Pedersen, & Stonecipher, 2011). Each of the newspapers reaches a daily audience of more than 200,000 people, meaning that they have the potential to influence a significant number of people. Further, the three newspapers have different political biases, and it was hoped that this would yield a more diverse representation of youth crime stories. This was important because social reality can be constructed differently depending on political affiliation and social background. The frequency and number of articles may change depending on biases the papers may have. Further, news content and tone could be

influenced by the political leanings and social background of the readership. Journalists choose, interpret and construct particular stories not only to reflect their own social outlook, but also their particular readership. When choosing which story is selected, how the story will be presented and which facts are used (Sprott, 1996), editors and journalists will consider what will appeal to their readers.

Table 4-1: *Circulation and Political Ties for Each News Publication Included in the Study*

Newspaper	Political Leaning	Circulation	Total Number of Youth Crime Articles in study
National Post (previously called the Financial Post)	Right	More than 200,000	104
Globe and Mail	Center	More than 320,000	365
Toronto Star	Left of Center	More than 300,000	620
Total			1089

For this study, a detailed content analysis of articles on youth crime published in the three Canadian newspapers between January 1st 1991 and December 31st 2014 was undertaken. Literature searches in Lexus Nexus and Factiva were first conducted to identify articles on youth crime in Canada. Both archiving search engines were used because each one yielded some different results although the bulk of the stories overlapped. Key terms were used to identify stories on youth crime and violence. The key terms used were: ‘youth crime,’ ‘youth violence,’ ‘girl crime,’ ‘girl violence,’ ‘boy crime,’ and ‘boy violence.’ ‘Young offenders act’ and ‘youth criminal justice act’ were excluded from the searches as they yielded most of the same articles and many others that

were on politicians rather than youth crime (i.e., legislation merely mentioned in passing). Initially, the search yielded thousands of results but as each were read for content, the number decreased. As part of the analysis process, the articles were read several different times. First, they were read to determine if they were in fact articles on youth crime or youth violence. Second, they were read to identify emerging themes respecting how youth crime was portrayed. Both quantitative and qualitative coding schemes were used. Subsequent readings confirmed themes and allowed for the comprehension of rich descriptive findings, and the identification of trends in article content over time.

This chapter relies predominantly on the quantitative portion of this data analysis. Simple counts of articles published by year, in all three newspapers, were compiled. Variations in these counts over time were determined. Once final counts of news articles were tallied by year, preliminary slopes and correlations functions were completed in Excel to determine if there were any correlations between the frequency of news accounts per year, and charge rates over time. Next, the extent to which trends in newspaper articles correspond to, or differ from, trends in crime rates was analyzed. To determine if a relationship exists between charge rate trends and the frequency of news stories on youth crime a correlations test was carried out using the Spearman's rho non-parametric statistic in SPSS. Spearman's rho was used because neither the crime trends, nor the newspaper reporting trends were normally distributed. Pearson's test of dependency requires a normal distribution.

Spearman's rho or Spearman's rank order correlation is used to assess the strength of the relationship between two variables. The two variables of interest here are number of news articles per year, and number of youth charged per year (per 100,000). In essence, the test ranks responses on each variable (for each of the 24 years): the highest number of newspapers or charges in a given year is ranked one, the next highest two, and so on. The Spearman's rho correlation determines how closely these rankings coincide. In a perfect positive correlation, the rankings would be identical, and years with high numbers of newspaper articles would also have high numbers of charges. If the rankings do not coincide at all, we would expect a correlation of 0.

Subsequent to this correlation analysis, I conducted follow-up qualitative analysis to explore those moments when crime trends and news reports did not correspond closely. If newspaper reports do not reflect crime rates, what do they reflect? I took a closer look at news publications during periods when publications were high but charges were low, to identify the crimes and issues that captured the attention of the media, and to determine if there was any evidence of a moral panic. For the latter analysis, I had to operationalize 'moral panic'. As mentioned above, Cohen argued that moral panics could be identified by looking at the reactions of the press, the public, agents of social control, politicians and legislators, and various action groups (Cohen, 1972, 2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). According to Cohen (1972) and others, moral panics have five primary characteristics: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility (Ben-Yehuda, 1986; Cohen, 1972, 2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009, 2010).

Concern refers to an intensified sense of worry or anxiety that can be characterized in supposedly objective ways, such as surveys, opinion polls, crime statistics, and public commentary by experts and others. To solidify the concern, 'experts' and 'statistical proof' are used within media portrayals of social problems to put forward the notion that the problem has gotten so out of hand that debate regarding the authenticity of these claims is silenced (Krinsky, 2008a, 2008b). Hall et al. (1978) suggest that when 'experts' purport that certain type of crimes or criminals have become a threat to society due to 'sudden and dramatic' increases that cannot be verified using official data, we know that a moral panic has begun. *Hostility* refers to the increased level of resentment and opposition toward an identifiable group. The behaviour of the segment of society is deemed to be threatening to traditional ways and the smooth functioning of the whole. This results in the creation of a 'folk devil' that reinforces an 'us versus them' mentality, and the undesirables are condemned. *Consensus* occurs when reports claim there is agreement by society as a whole or certain segments of a society that the folk devil or perceived threat is not only real, but also serious and the fault of the aforementioned identifiable group. The level of agreement affects the size of the relative moral panic and even if a smaller proportion believes in the dangers presented by the folk devil, it can be said that a moral panic still exists for that particular segment of society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). *Disproportionality* is evident when the perception of danger or threat of

harm is far beyond what is actually reasonable or appropriate (Cohen 1972). During a moral panic, sensationalized statistics, statements, and figures, ascribed to various experts are used to suggest there is a substantial threat to the public (Ben-Yehuda, 1986; Cohen, 1972, 2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009, 2010). Lastly, moral panics are inherently *volatile*. They emerge quickly and dissipate just as fast. This said, they may lie dormant for extended periods of time, and can reappear in a similar or slightly different form every so often. According to Goode & Ben-Yeuda (2009, p. 41, emphasis in original), it is possible for some moral panics to,

become *routinized* or *institutionalized*, that is, after the panic has run its course, the moral concern about the target behavio[u]r results in, or remains in place in the form of, social movement organizations, legislation, enforcement practices, informal interpersonal norms or practices for punishing transgressors.

To ascertain if there was evidence of moral panic in news articles on youth crime, I reviewed news articles for evidence of concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility. The findings of both analyses are presented below.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 UCR and Newspaper Trends

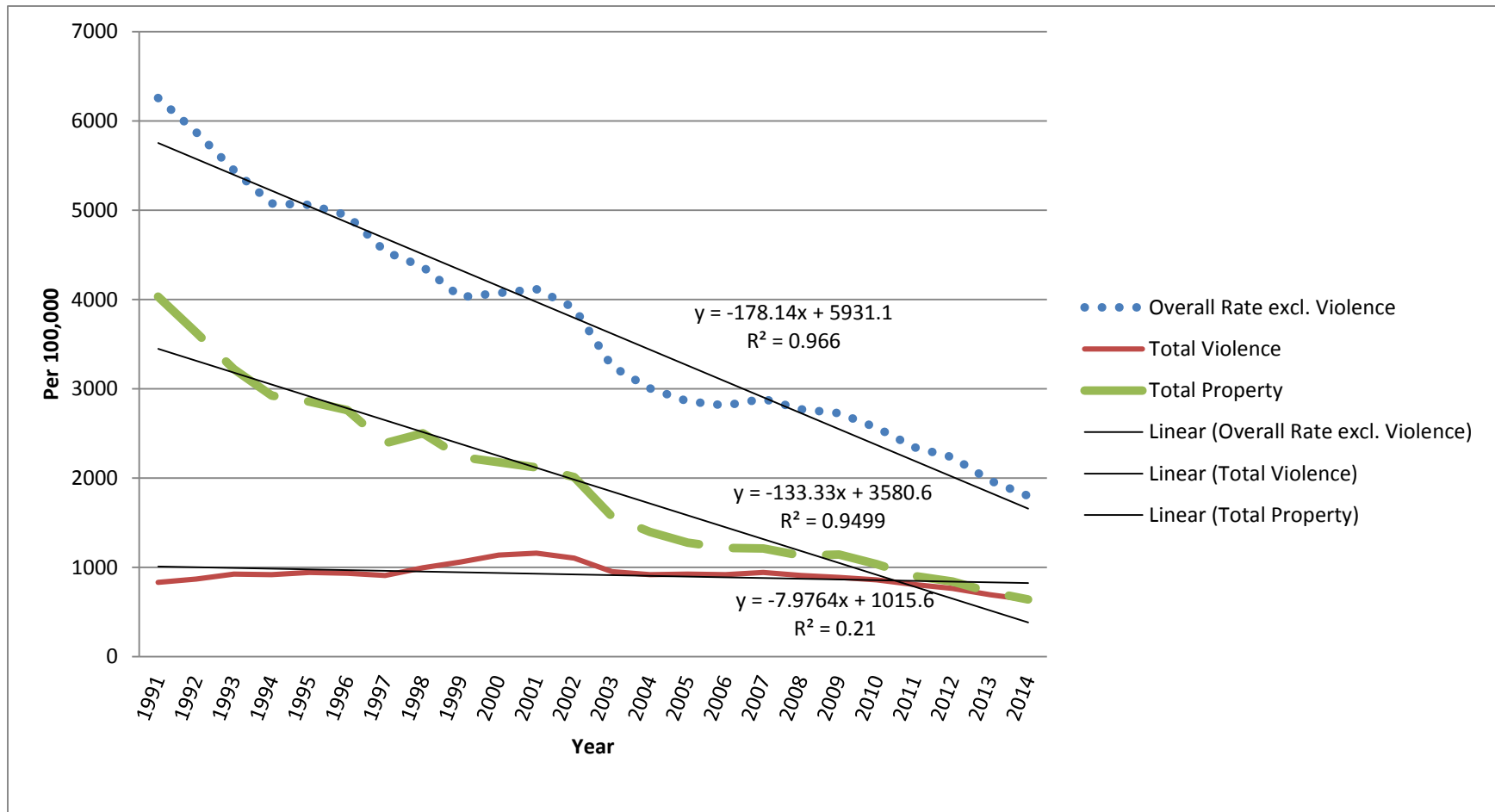
Figures 4-1 and 4-2 present the UCR charging trends for youth per 100,000 between 1991 and 2014. Figure 4-1 includes the overall crime rate (excluding traffic), crimes against property, and crimes against the person. Looking at both overall crime and property crime trends in Figure 4-1, there is a steady decline in the number of youth (per 100,000) charged. Violent crime rates, or crimes against the person, show a modest decline over time, especially since 2001. Figure 4-2 simply provides a close-up of the violent crime trend line depicted in 4-1. With this close-up we can see that despite several fluctuations, violent crime charges tended to increase up to 2001, before experiencing a decline.

Figure 4-3 presents the trends in the frequency of news articles on youth crime in Canada over time. In contrast to the charging trend data, news reports demonstrate considerable volatility, spiking in 1992, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2008 (see Figure 4-3). These spikes have no clear visual parallels to overall crime rates depicted in Figure 4.1. The volatility of the newspaper trend line would appear to support a “moral panic” interpretation. Nevertheless, the trend in recent years is towards a general decline in news articles on youth crime, just like there is a general decline in youth crime charges.

To determine whether news article frequency and UCR charge rates were correlated, I utilized the Spearman’s rho non-parametric statistic. Analysis revealed a positive correlation between the total number of charges per year and the number of news stories published per year in all three newspapers ($r_s = 0.399$, $p = 0.054$). A positive correlation was also found between property crime and news articles ($r_s = 0.398$, $p = 0.054$). Both of these relationships are not strong, and they are only marginally statistically significant. The strongest correlation was found between news article frequency and charges for violent crime, or crimes against a person ($r_s = 0.635$, $p = 0.0009$).

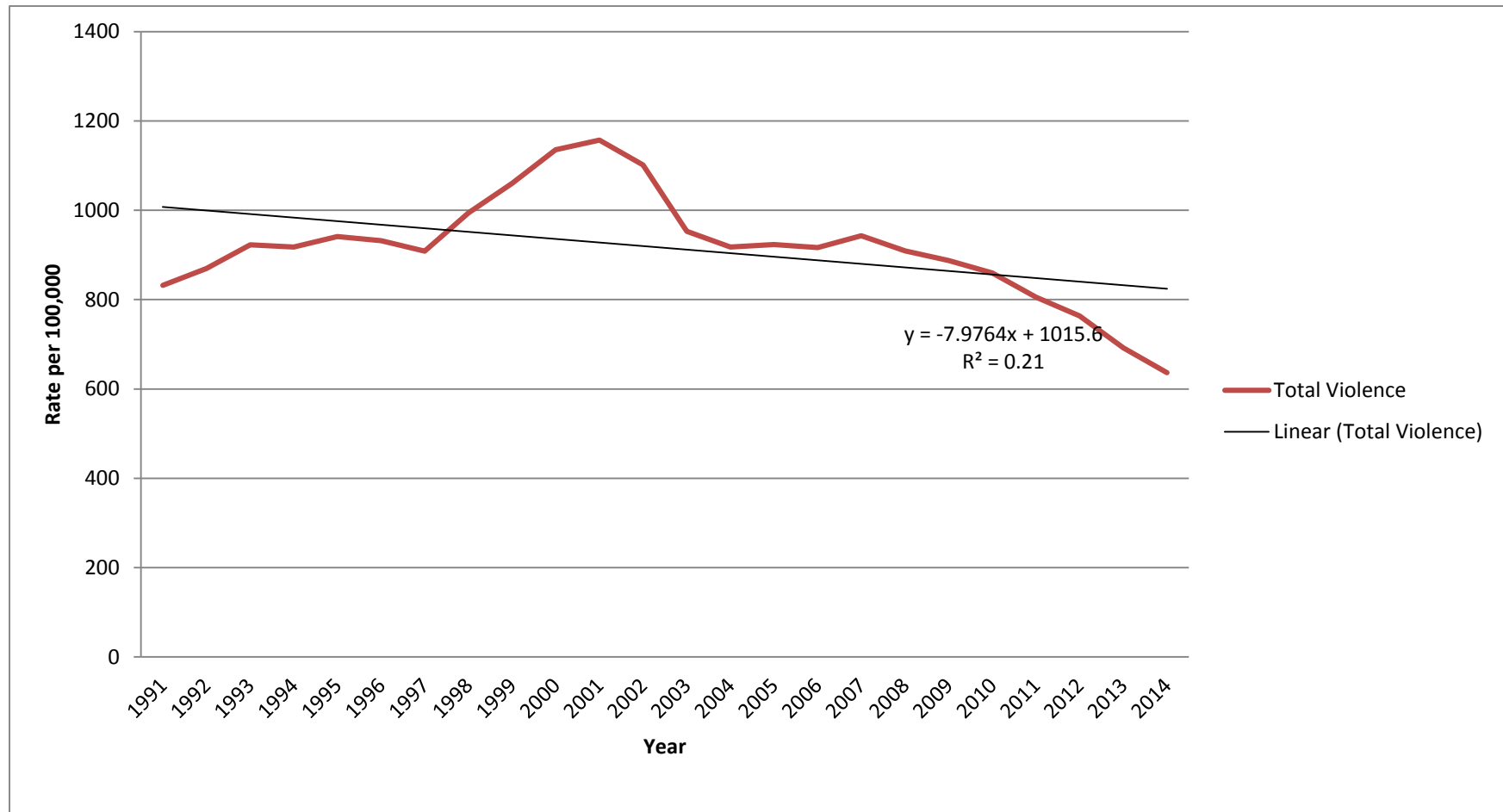
Given the media’s reputation for sensationalism, it is perhaps not surprising that the strongest correlation is found not for property crime or overall crime, but violent crime charges. The correlation between news and crime trends was unexpected. Newspaper articles do, at least partially, reflect real violent crime trends. Nonetheless, there is not a perfect correlation between crime rates and news articles, and a comparison of figures 4-2 and 4-3 suggests that there are moments where newspaper articles focus on youth violence, even when charge rates are not increasing. In the same vein, violent crime charge rates peak in 2001, when news articles report few crimes. Follow-up analyses were conducted to look at the spikes in newspaper coverage more closely, and to determine if there is evidence of a moral panic.

Figure 4-1: UCR Youth Charging Trends per 100,000 between 1991 and 2014



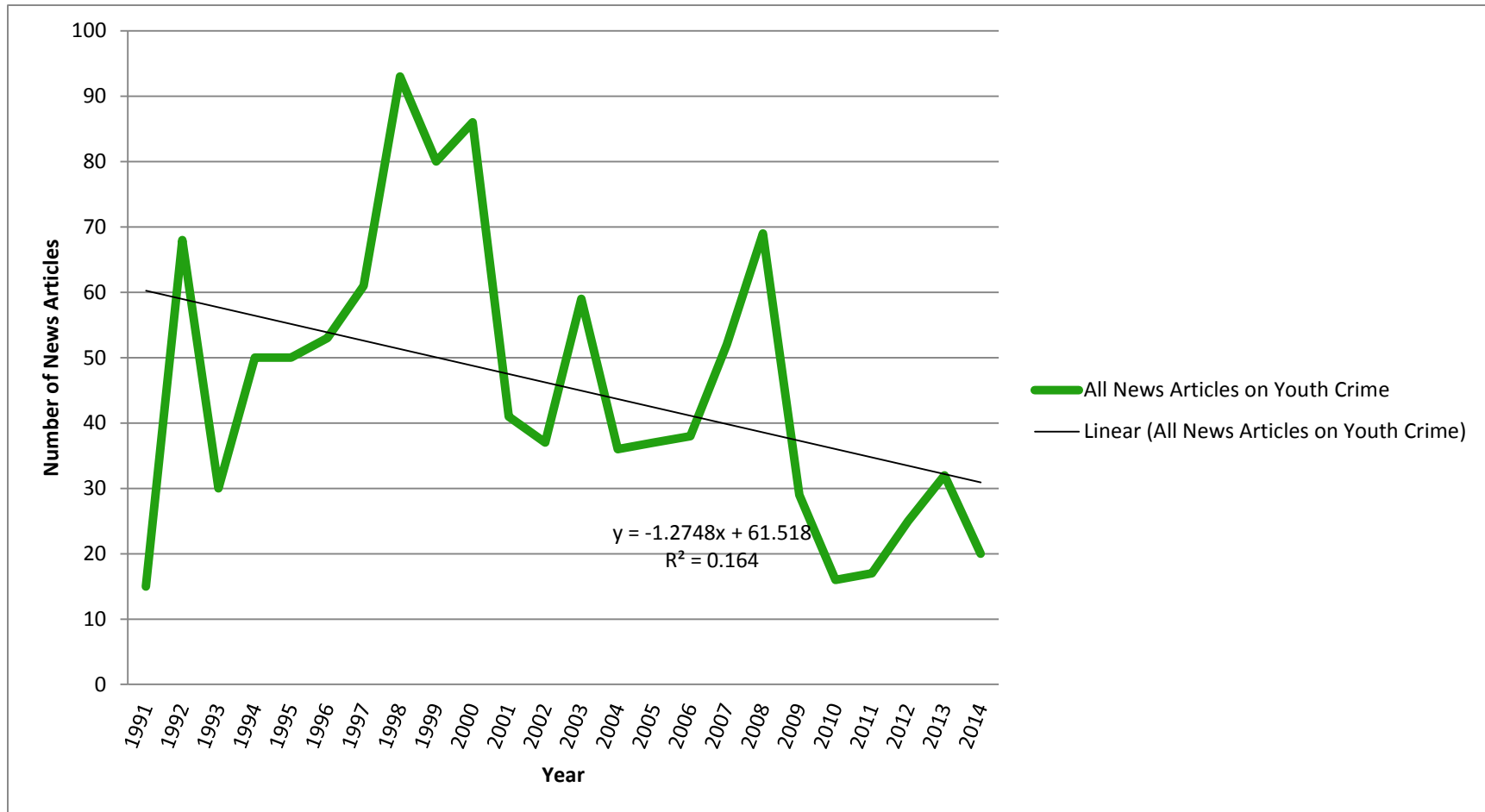
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

Figure 4-2: Violent UCR Youth charging Trends per 100,000 between 1991 and 2014



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

Figure 4-3: National News Articles About Youth Crime between 1991 and 2014



4.4.2 Newspapers and Moral Panics

For this analysis, each news article was coded according to the type of crime discussed in the text, and relationship to criminal case or event. High-profile cases and events were identified. Special attention was paid to the periods where newspaper coverage of youth crime spiked: 1992, 1997-2000, 2003, 2006-2008, and 2012-2013 (see Figure 4-3). During these peak periods news reporting focused on several high profile cases including rising racial tension in Toronto (1992), the Columbine high school shootings (April 20th 1999) and Alberta school shootings (April 28th 1999), discussions of girls' participation in gangs (1998), and the murders of Reena Virk (1997) and Jordan manners (2007)¹⁰. Table 4-2 summarizes the number of articles published on each of these high-profile cases.

Table 4-2: Numbers of News Stories on Significant High Profile Cases

Racial Tension in Toronto & GTA (1992)	Reena Virk Murder (1997)	'Spadina Girls' & Female Gangs (1997-1998)	Columbine & Taber Shootings (1999)	Jordan Manners Murder (2007)
23	64	18	48	47

With these cases identified, analyses were conducted of article content to determine if there was evidence of a moral panic. As described earlier a moral panic can be said to

¹⁰ The discourse surrounding each of these crimes differed and varied based on depictions of gender, race and class; however it is not within the scope of this manuscript to explore gendered and racialized discourses in depth. Gender will be discussed further in the next chapter.

exist, according to Cohen (1972), when the following traits are present: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility. The following sub-sections explore whether these traits are evident in the news coverage of these high-profile cases, with the exception of the Columbine shootings, which have been discussed elsewhere (Springhall, 2008). Springhall (2008) found that there was a moral panic surrounding the Columbine shootings that linked the crime with popular youth culture. The moral panic zeroed in on ‘Goth rock’ culture as a precursor to gun violence in schools (Springhall, 2008).

4.4.2.1 Racial Tension and Youth Crime in 1992

The first peak in newspaper coverage occurs in 1992, and concerns the “Toronto race riots” which occurred on May 4th that year. These riots reflected rising tension between the police and people of colour in Toronto, and commentary reflecting interracial conflict became a major theme across news stories in this particular year. The riot occurred following an anti-racism protest of around 1000 people that occurred after a white Toronto police officer shot and killed a 22-year-old black man for supposed crack dealing. Although the protest started peacefully, it ended with three hundred or so individuals smashing windows and looting store merchandise. This incident, along with what had become known as ‘Black Monday,’ led to attempts to forbid black youth from attending the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in 1992. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the CNE had experienced an influx of young people causing violent disturbances and looting booths on Labour Day (or ‘Black Monday’). News coverage suggested that danger arose when young black men of colour formed groups or gangs. The rising tension between the races in Toronto was expressed in 14 articles with four drawing specific reference to the race riots on Yonge Street.

A subsequent fight on June 1st 1992 between two rival gangs, tied to different non-Caucasian racial groups, led to a large brawl of more than 100 students from various Toronto high schools on Centre Island a week later (on ‘national skip-off day’). This brawl further heightened public anxiety regarding gang violence, youth uprisings, and racial conflicts. Although more than 2500 students went to Centre Island for the mock

holiday, “hooligans looking for trouble” were blamed for engaging in a senseless and savage brawl that attacked “bystanders and police alike” (“Out of control,” *The Toronto Star*, 1992). Twelve news articles from 1992 discussed events of the Toronto Island ‘brawl’.

Although the number of articles published on these issues was not terribly high, newspaper coverage at this time does show signs of a moral panic. Here, working-class and young people of colour became **folk devils**, described as representing a new form of out-of-control teenager eager to form violent groups or gangs that ‘roved’ in packs (“Out of control,” *The Toronto Star*, 1992). Further, these somewhat isolated events were described in **disproportionate** terms – taken as a sign of decaying youth and societal disruption. A mother of one victim claimed, “The young guys are becoming really bad. It seems like everybody is trying to kill everybody. I don't know what's going to happen in the future” (“Victim asks why youths are ‘so angry,’” *The Toronto Star*, 1992). One Toronto detective was quoted as saying, “I couldn’t believe it. They knew we were cops and they were still ready to fight each other right on the deck” (“Police, students agree gangs started Centre Island brawls,” *The Toronto Star*, 1992). An Acting Deputy Chief pondered if he was “going to have to have a policeman on every corner” (“Better parks-police ties sought,” *The Toronto Star*, 1992). Furthermore, the tone and language in articles was one of **concern** and **hostility**, portraying youth uprisings as a new and dangerous trend – one that the police and existing legislation were ill-equipped to handle. Young people “thumb[ed] their noses” at the Canadian justice system (“Youth gangs laugh at law detective says,” *The Toronto Star*, 1992). One Toronto Star article included quotes from concerned members of the public, with one woman stating: [s]ome young blacks who got into trouble with the law were showing disrespect for the police” (“Youth and Police,” 1992). It was articulated by many that traditional social control mechanisms were not working and heightened measures were required to stop the social problem.

After each incident, there were calls for greater control of young people in public spaces, indicative of the ‘us versus them’ hostility characteristic of a moral panic. Large groups of youth were equated with gangs and racial minority groups. There was a growing fear that once young people banded together, nothing could stop them. It was assumed in the

rhetoric that normal types of social control no longer worked on these particular youth and that “[i]n this high-pressure society, with drugs, you can no longer assume that your kids are with their friends” (“Youth and Police,” 1992). Another member of the public stated in the same article: “[t]he police are doing their job, but many black parents aren't doing theirs” (“Youth and Police,” 1992). The folk devil created, namely teens of colour, was said to be the product of poor parenting and black culture: “[y]ou can't blame the education system as a cop-out argument. Discipline should begin with the parents” (“Youth and Police,” *The Toronto Star*, 1992). The take-home message in news articles was that adults should be suspicious of all youth. The following quote shows how even members of the black community believed that more social control and hard work was needed to fix the race-based issues: “[b]ut we have to be honest and say that we have to pull our socks up. The dependency - the blaming of the white man - is getting out of all proportion” (“Youth and Police,” 1992).

A consensus appeared to emerge among the Toronto police chief, activist groups, and the general public, demanding greater control of young people in public spaces. According to one Scarborough detective, “[t]o say there is no problem is either ignorance in the extreme or it's an outright lie... The criminals of tomorrow are in the schools today” (MacKinnon, *The Toronto Star*, 1992). While some believed the situation was not yet out of control, it had the potential to become so: “[t]hings aren't as bad as in the United States, but the red lights are flashing” according to one Canadian teacher (Solnicki, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, 1992). To address the problem various solutions were proposed including utilizing greater force against unruly young people, stiffer punishments for those convicted of violent crimes, failing students caught for skipping school, and a return to the strap and corporal punishment in schools (“Better parks-police ties sought,” 1992, “Out of control,” 1992, “Police, students agree gangs started Centre Island brawls,” 1992; Nation, 1992a, 1992a, 1992b).

In late August of 1992, there was still a great deal of chatter about what had happened months earlier and as the final day of the CNE neared, it was suggested that black youth stay at home, away from the exhibition, to avoid any altercations. A headline from the *Toronto Star* exemplifies this sentiment, “[s]kip last day of CNE, black youths urged”

(Nation, 1992a) The justification was that there was “convincing evidence to substantiate [that] this disgusting behavio[u]r” was that of a few black young people and although these claims might be offensive in the black community, it was merely a sad “reality” (Nation, the Toronto Star 1992b). Attention to this issue dissipated as quickly as it arose, revealing the **volatility** of this particular moral panic.

4.4.2.2 The Murder of Reena Virk in 1997 and Girl Gangs in 1998

The next peak occurred between the years 1997 and 1999, when several high profile crimes took place. The murder of schoolgirl Reena Virk in 1997 garnered considerable media attention. The attack on Virk began when several girls and two boys assaulted Virk for being different. Shortly after the assault, one boy and one girl returned and drowned Virk. The focus of news coverage was on girls’ involvement in the crime, and news articles openly questioned what could be going wrong with girls to make them behave in such non-traditional and unfeminine ways. There is evidence of a moral panic in news coverage of this event as well.

In news coverage, the girls were described as heartless women who were devoid of traditional femininity. The representations were **hostile**, depicting young (violent) girls as deviant compared to their predecessors. They were portrayed as uncontrollable young women that traveled in ‘packs’ while terrorizing innocent citizens. Some news stories even referred to the crime as a ‘moral panic’ since the murder would have been horrific had it been perpetrated by boys but “the fact that they [were] female really exacerbates that rage” (Mitchell, *The Globe and Mail*, 1997). A professor from British Columbia is quoted as saying that although most girls are doing fine, there are “growing numbers” of girls being “seduced by media images of women that bring together... the images of sex and violence” (Cox, *The Toronto Star*, 1997). The Virk murder was taken as evidence that the today’s young women were much more violent than others – a **disproportional** response considering how few women and girls take part in violent crimes. Some journalists cautioned readers that Virk was not the first victim of girl violence and that “In Metro Toronto, police estimate that teenaged girls are responsible for about 20 per

cent of the violent crimes committed by youths and that this rate is growing steadily each year” (Walkom, *The Toronto Star*, 1997).

Experts in various fields including psychologists that specialized in female serial killers, university professors, teachers, police sergeants, research directors, and others all spoke to the new trend in girl violence in both Canada and the United States: “[u]nfortunately, it seems to be a sign of the times” (Abbate, *The Globe and Mail*, 2001). In discussions of other murders in subsequent years, the murder of Virk was recalled “as a dramatic reminder that the social problem of violent youth crime is not something limited to big cities” (Hume, 2000). With so many experts weighing in, a **consensus** emerged that girls’ crime was not only a cause for **concern**, but also deserved of swift and certain punishment: “the nature of her death is a chilling reminder of the profound gap that still exists between what adults know... [and the] often dark world of adolescence” (Walkom, *The Toronto Star*, 1997).

Ill-contextualized and exaggerated statistics were provided to demonstrate to readers that girls’ crime was a new epidemic. For instance, a 2002 article uses Virk’s name to elicit concern regarding violence among girls, “[a]lthough the percentage seems statistically small, the ripple effect that 10 violent girls can have in a school of 500, for instance, can be extensive. Their hostility in the playground and disruptions in class can affect most students and staff” (Teotonio, *The Toronto Star*, 2002).

The message in each of these articles remains clear, something ought to be done to control the behaviours of girls (and youth). New police task forces and programs for aggressive girls were created to deal with the new issue of girl violence and to quell rising questions from the public concerning “how people can be so violent” (Lunman, *The Globe and Mail*, 2001). For instance, in the year 2000, Virk’s name was used by the Conservative Ontario Government to implement the Parental Responsibility Act that would “impose civil liability of up to \$6,000 on parents who fail to adequately supervise or discourage criminal behaviour in their children” (“Parents may face \$6,000 penalty for children’s crimes,” *The Toronto Star*, 2000).

Coverage of the Virk murder spilled over into coverage of ‘violent girls’ in general in the late 1990s. In 1998, a new wave of articles on female gang membership were published, that drew on the fears voiced in both the moral panic around Virk, and the earlier moral panic around gangs. Media coverage of “the Spadina Girls” continued the theme that girls in groups could be just as dangerous, if not more dangerous than boys in groups. In this articles, **concern** is evident in the descriptors used to discuss the Spadina Girls, as a “viscous” female gang in Toronto that sometimes operated in cahoots with violent Asian male gangs (Shephard, 1998a; Vincent, *The Globe and Mail*, 1998). In articles from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*, the Spadina Girls were said to be “unleash[ing] a violent ‘reign of terror’ against students” by assaulting, extorting, and harassing other girls at a Toronto high school (Shephard, *The Toronto Star*, 1998a, 1998b; Vincent, *The Globe and Mail*, 1998). Various experts and officials are quoted saying that the threat girl gangs posed was beyond what was previously imaginable. A quote by psychologist Fred Matthews exemplifies the growing **hostility** and portrayal of girl gang membership in **disproportion** with the reality of female offending: “[w]hen I talk to the Grade 9 students even, I’m shocked. Things are changing.” The psychologist continued to suggest that society needed to acknowledge antisocial behaviours in girls and realize that they are just as aggressive as boys (Shephard, *The Toronto Star*, 1998a). Matthews is quoted in other news sources saying that the Spadina Girls’ activities were not “atypical behaviour” (Vincent, *The Globe and Mail*, 1998). Another quote suggests they were merely “indicative of a pattern in high schools across Canada” (Vincent, *The Globe and Mail*, 1998).

Poorly contextualized governmental statistics were used to suggest that violent offences among girls between the ages of 12 and 17 had risen 179% in the previous decade (Shephard, *The Toronto Star*, 1998b). The article does not clarify if the statistics are standardized for population or mention that this could be partly a result of policing patterns. Regardless, experts called for greater social control at home and in the schools, policing intervention, and tougher legislation (Duncanson & Rankin, *The Toronto Star*, 1998; Shephard, *The Toronto Star*, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998e; Vincent, *The Globe and Mail*, 1998). The many officials and experts quoted in the newspaper articles, present a

consensus opinion: girls are increasingly out of control and just as violent as their male counterparts.

Although there is mention of Spadina Girls in the year 2000, the moral panic is contained within the year 1998 showing its **volatility**. Nevertheless, the panic surrounding girls' involvement in gangs resurfaced periodically in subsequent years, whenever there was a case involving girls, as a means to emphasize the seriousness of the issue.

4.4.2.3 The Murder of Jordan Manners in 2007

The 2007 shooting murder of Jordan Manners at a Toronto high school (C.W. Jefferys Collegiate) was also heavily covered in Canadian newspapers. It was mentioned in at least 47 news articles. Manners' death shocked many because it occurred during the school day inside a Toronto high school – a first for the Toronto District School Board. Like the example involving Virk and the 'bad girls' responsible for her death, Manners' death was often described as merely "the latest in a series of recent school related violent incidents" (Appleby, *The Globe and Mail*, 2008). Manners instantly became the poster boy for victimized youth in Canada, but was regarded as just one recent victim of a "spate of youth violence," perpetrated by teenagers unable to control their tempers (Gillespie & Rushowy, *The Toronto Star*, 2007). Today's youth were said to fight in ways unheard of in past generations -- in broad daylight, with knives and guns which were too accessible for young people on Canada's streets. Articles articulated clear **concerns** with the frequency with which these types of youth crime supposedly occurred: "[h]ow many more people have to die on the streets in broad daylight or in schools or anywhere else before we're going to see an action plan?" asked Progressive Conservative Leader John Tory at Queen's Park (Gillespie, *The Toronto Star*, 2007). Once again, these media accounts reveal **hostility**, and cast all young people as potentially criminal (**disproportionality**). The problem, while referred to as youth violence in news media, also included undertones of race and class as the concern about crime included references to "multiculturalism" and being able to ask the "tough questions about race, ethnicity, poverty, housing and the importance of personal and media role models" (Davis, *The*

Toronto Star, 2007; Kassam, *The Toronto Star*, 2007). These quotes reflect the belief that youth crime is an issue among teens of colour and those living in poverty unable to afford summer programs.

Considerable **concern** about this crime, led to calls for change: “metal detectors” (Alcoba, *National Post*, 2007) and “sniffer dogs” (Campbell, *The Globe and Mail*, 2008) to locate guns in schools, the installation of new and constant video-surveillance cameras and the hiring of “more school police” (Gurney, *National Post*, 2009) were said to be needed. For instance, the investment of 100 million dollars to create a youth commissioner and get youth involved in programs to offset their criminal activity was mentioned as a necessity following Manner’s death. The author of this article is quoted as saying that a “central repository [a provincial school safety office] for the reporting of serious issues [is needed for] student safety” (Appleby, *The Globe and Mail*, 2008)

As in the other cases, experts were quoted to suggest that this case was simply part of a broader trend of increased student violence (demonstrating **consensus**). This was an issue that was not a concern just to law enforcement, but one in which “[c]ommunity leaders [were] united in their calls for justice” (“Violence probe worthy,” *The Toronto Star*, 2007). Included in the calls for justice was the creation of various programs and task forces to understand the issue of youth violence. For instance, programs, developed to enable greater police presence in schools, were to be expanded “to all Toronto high schools as soon as possible... including C. W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute, site of the 2007 murder of Jordan Manners” (Gurney, *National Post*, 2009). Not all citizens believed police presence in schools was a good thing; “certain ethnic districts” were said to distrust the police (Gurney, *National Post*, 2009). Some believed that it was idleness and the lack of community centers that led to issues such as these, “Manners’ school, C.W. Jefferys Collegiate, is one of the locations that will offer youth programs all summer long” (Gillespie & Rushowy, *The Toronto Star*, 2007). In these instances, it was believed that if accessible programs were available, youth would not get into trouble.

Greatest attention to this issue is found in the period around Manners’ death in 2007 (suggesting **volatility**). Nevertheless, there are articles published up until 2014 (this

study's end date), which revisit Manners' death after youth violence events in Toronto. The connection between new and old cases of student violence reinvigorate calls for continued vigilance in schools.

4.5 Discussion and Conclusion

Prior research claims that actual crime statistics have little to do with crime reporting and that media portrayals of youth criminality and crime tend to be exaggerated and can be classified as moral panics (Best, 1999; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; Chesney-Lind, 1999, 1999; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004, 2004; Faith, 2011; Jewkes, 2015, 2004, 2011; Krinsky, 2008b; Males, 2010; Sangster, 2002; Welch et al., 2002). This analysis provides mixed support for this assessment and adds nuance to the literature on representations of youth crime. Comparing trends in youth crime with trends in reports on youth crime highlights differences. While youth crime is generally decreasing over time, news reports are more volatile, increasing dramatically in some years, decreasing in others. Nonetheless, overall crime rates and violent crime rates do correlate positively with newspaper accounts. Thus, newspaper articles on crime appear to, at least in part, reflect real crime trends. This said, there are times when newspaper articles deviate from crime trends, and media attention to youth crime spikes. This study has shown that these spikes coincide with specific cases that captured the media's attention. The media's portrayal of these cases possesses the characteristics of a moral panic.

Furthermore, these moral panics were clearly shaped by class, gender, race, and age. Societal concern about racial minorities (and the economically disadvantaged) fueled the moral panics surrounding youth in gangs and Jordan Manners' murder. Concern about changing gender roles and changing meanings of femininity appears to underlie the moral panic surrounding Virk's murder and girls' involvement in gangs. Age was very much part of these moral panics as today's youth are seen as different from previous generations, and 'out of control'. Thus, the intersection of gender, class, race, and age was a factor shaping media accounts that fueled moral panics around youth crime.

Previous research has highlighted the significance of gender and race to moral panics (Chambliss, 1995; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; DeKeserdy, 2010; Fasiolo & Leckie, 1993; Kilty, 2010; Littlefield, 2008; C. Y. Thompson et al., 2000; Welch et al., 2002). However, greater attention should be paid to the intersection of class, age, race, and gender, and how this intersection is embedded within media coverage.

Previous research has raised concerns over media coverage of violent crime (Chesney-Lind, 1999; DeKeserdy, 2010; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Jewkes, 2004, 2011, 2015; Surette, 2010, 2015; Welch et al., 2002). Since much of the knowledge individuals in the Western world have regarding crime and criminality comes from mass media, the steady stream of sensationalistic representations of crime littered throughout newspapers could leave the public with the perception that crime is increasingly random, violent and prevalent within society, regardless of actual (and contextualized) crime statistics. In fact, crime rates have decreased over time. Although the number of news articles on youth crime varies, to some extent, with the incidence of youth crime, the content of those articles too often does not reflect real-life trends. Rather, during moral panics, newspapers report that crime is on the rise and youth are out of control. The result is a distorted picture. Because this picture is gendered and racialized, these depictions reproduce social inequalities, and exacerbate racial tensions and gender biases. The general public is left with the impression that youth crime is violent, on the rise, and that racialized youth and young women are particularly dangerous. These impressions are erroneous and harmful.

The reality is that youth crime has declined over time, and most youth crime is petty and non-violent. It is important for media to disseminate this message as well. By focusing on high profile crimes, and depicting them as typical, media accounts can, and do, distort social perceptions.

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Chapter 5

5 Institutionalized ‘Bad Girls’: Adolescent Female Folk Devils in Canadian Newspapers between 1991 and 2014

5.1 Introduction

Several Canadian scholars have commented on the growing fear of violence among North American girls (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Kilty, 2010; Pate, 1999). According to researchers, since the 1990s, high-profile cases involving violent girls in Canada have added considerable fuel to the already growing media fire surrounding the ‘new violent girl’ (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Corrado, Odgers, & Cohen, 2000, p.191). The cases that spurred the media frenzy were the rape and murder of two schoolgirls in Ontario by Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka, and the murder of Reena Virk by a group of teenaged girls and two teenaged boys in Victoria, British Columbia (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Corrado et al., 2000; Kilty, 2010). The media coverage on the Virk murder in particular fostered the view that the current generation of teenage girls was becoming more dangerous. They were potentially just as violent as their male counterparts (Corrado et al., 2000). The sensationalistic reporting appeared to continue despite the reassuring voices of several academics stating that neither crime, nor the severity of crime, by young girls was increasing (Chapter 3; Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Pate, 1999; Reitsma-Street, 1999; Sprott & Doob, 2009).

In this chapter I explore the patterns and trends in Canadian news reporting on female youth violence between 1991 and 2014. To understand if the news articles reflect real trends in the conviction rates of girls, a statistical comparison was performed. Prior literature takes for granted that media accounts do not reflect real crime trends, but rather present sensationalized depictions and reflect moral panics. I examine whether these articles are sparked, in part, by a real increase in criminal behaviour among female youth. In addition, I present the findings from a qualitative analysis of news reports exploring

depictions of girls' crime. Here, I examine whether depictions of female youth crime represent what Chesney-Lind (2006) refers to as a 'feminist backlash.'

5.2 Background and Literature: Girls, Crime, and Moral Panics

In an attempt to challenge assumptions around female criminality, and the myth of women's and girls' increasing violence, researchers have identified the existence of moral panics around girls' crime, and the creation of female folk devils. Moral panics about 'bad girls' have occurred periodically over the last sixty-five years in various forms of mass media, ranging from popular films, to novels and news stories (Males, 2010). According to Males (2010), each decade has had a variant version of the female-centered folk devil. For instance, in the 1950s, there was a multitude of books capitalizing on the fear of strong women. Canadian scholar Karlene Faith (2011) has shown that in the 1950s there was a sharp decline in the presentation of "girlish innocence" within cinema (p.262). She suggests that this was due to the rising political and social rights movement that began to take shape for women and that there was a need to depict teenage girls as "devoid of old-fashioned virtue" (Faith, 2011, p.263). To do this, busty women were depicted on book covers clenching their fists or holding guns while the title overlays read "I'll Fix You" and "Jailbait" (Males, 2010).

The 1970s witnessed a spreading fear of the 'revolutionary woman' as women began to secure rights and freedoms previously denied to them during the second wave of feminism (Faith, 2011). It was not long before scholars and journalists began to make a connection between the powerful women's rights movement and women's criminality. In 1975, Freda Adler ignited a media frenzy when she suggested that rising crime rates among women were the result of second wave feminisms' liberation tenants (Adler, 1975). Adler, and others before her, stressed that women's emancipation would lead to a world where women would forget their feminine and gentle virtues and generate a new, more worrisome form of femininity filled with crime, aggression and violence (Chesney-Lind, 2006).

A more recent example of a gendered folk devil is the ‘nasty girl’ image of the 1990s, which highlighted some of the anxiety Canadians had regarding the changing roles of women and girls. According to Barron and Lacombe (2005), a CBC documentary entitled “Nasty Girls,” which aired in 1997, depicted young girls of the 1990s as no longer concerned with the traditional facets of femininity, but instead enthralled with hip hop and gang culture, rock music, aggressive sexuality, and materialism. The images in the documentary were juxtaposed with nostalgic images of girls from the 1950s portraying stereotypical feminine behaviours of passivity and domesticity (Barron & Lacombe, 2005). The authors explain that during this time, the growing anxiety about ‘social decline’ created the ‘nasty girl’ folk devil that threatened to destabilize traditional societal gender norms (p.53).

The concern about women and girls’ involvement in crime and violence is not a new one, however. The father of criminology, Lombroso and his brother-in-law Ferrero (1895) believed that female criminals were especially dangerous because they defied feminine expectations and embodied the worst characteristics found in women; they were ‘cunning, spiteful, and deceitful,’ but also unduly strong like men with corrupted minds (Lombroso & Ferrero, 1895; Smart, 1977, 2013). The scientists recounted stories of female thieves who were so strong that they could leap from trees onto rooftops in order to evade arrest and prosecution, and of love-scorn women who murdered their lovers and could not be subdued by experienced gaolers (Lombroso & Ferrero, 1895, p. 131; Smart, 1977). This type of imagery is similar to that discussed above and can be tied to the ‘equality theory of crime.’

The ‘equality theory of crime’ or the ‘masculinity hypothesis’ argues that criminality is inherently unfeminine or masculine; hence women who break the law are trying to adopt ‘male’ gender roles (Chesney-Lind, 2006). While this theory is specifically about women’s and girls’ involvement in crime, it simultaneously tells a story about boys’ and men’s involvement in crime. Participation in violence and crime itself is seen as the domain of men and boys. Violence then, becomes a way to prove masculinity and can be done with the purpose of publically displaying manhood (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 1995; Kimmel & Holler, 2011; Kimmel, 2004; Messerschmidt, 1993,

1997, 1999, 2000, 2005). Boys are encouraged to fight and roughhouse in ways that girls are not. What results is the use of violence as currency among men to achieve 'real manhood' because it proves to themselves and other males that they are not feminine, like women and girls (Kimmel, 2004). These socially sanctioned portrayals of femininity, masculinity, and crime serve to reinforce traditional understandings of gender and crime.

The suggestion, by those who give credence to the equality theories of crime, is that as women and girls acquire greater freedoms within society, they will give up their femininity in favour of masculinity, violence, and crime. If this were the case, Western societies should have seen the numbers of girls and women involved in criminality skyrocket until parity between the sexes is reached. As chapters 2 and 3 show, this has not happened despite women and girls having gained considerable social justice advancements since the 1970s. The fact that women's and girls' crimes have not risen steeply has been noted by several feminist criminologists in both Canada and the United States (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; DeKeserdy, 2010; Faith, 2011; Males, 2010; Sprott & Doob, 2009, 2010). While there have been minimal increases in women's and girls' participation in crime since the 1970s, there is little to suggest that the emancipation of women has had anything to do with any increases. In fact, instead of feminism being the cause of female criminality, it has been pointed out that many of the changes in girls' criminality likely have more to do with differences in population size, policing practices, and changing youth legislation (Barber & Doob, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2010; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; DeKeserdy, 2010; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004; Doob & Sprott, 1998, 2006; Faith, 2011; Males, 2010; Pate, 1999; Reitsma-Street, 1999; Sprott & Doob, 2009, 2009).

As described in Chapter 4, what fuels the existence of a moral panic is the fear that a particular type of situation, person, or social phenomena has become a threat to the traditional moral configuration of a particular society (Schissel, 2006). Once the problem, or folk devil, is identified then justice authorities, media, and governments can form a 'control culture' to persuade the public that something 'ought' to be done about the problem. When it comes to female criminality and violence, mainstream media is

particularly apt to deliver messages about what is deemed acceptable or deviant in terms of gender, race, and class normative expectations. Prior research examining representations of criminalized or girls and women that have transgressed societal boundaries have found evidence to support what Chesney-Lind (2006) coined a ‘feminist backlash.’

A ‘feminist backlash’ represents a resistance at the societal level to any perceived threats to the traditional understandings of gender, race and class and the social norms that accompany each of these axes of power. The feminist backlash marks a particular kind of moral panic incited by right wing elements to reinstate a belief in the essentialist traits of each sex by controlling threatening behaviours and rolling back the rights of women and people of colour back to their traditionally disenfranchised and marginal locations (Chesney-Lind, 2006). Common tropes include depictions of masculinized women that have become increasingly violent since their political emancipation. Normalcy is reinforced with essentialist discourses of female passivity and male-based aggression, while deviant women and girls are blamed for breaking the proper rules and forms of femininity. Chesney-Lind (2006) argues that it is the traditional gender norms that inform popular media depictions of criminality, and determine how girls and women involved in criminal justice proceedings are portrayed. Further, she suggests discourses attempt to paint criminalized or aggressive women and girls, especially those of colour, as folk devils threatening a nostalgic past.

Scholars have provided evidence to support the existence of several folk devils and moral panics surrounding girls’ and women’s involvement with criminality and violence, but research has not explored whether this media attention is correlated with real crime and court trends. There has been no longitudinal research comparing crime rates with media reports over time. As a result, it is not clear if media reports are responding to real crime trends or not. Moreover, previous research on girls and crime has focused on a few high profile cases, without looking at broader trends over time. The study seeks to fill these gaps in the literature by addressing the following research questions:

- (1) How does the quantity of news articles specifically about female youth crime (both non-violent and violent crime) compare to real guilty findings in Canada between the years of 1991/92 and 2011/12?
- (2) If news article trends about girls and crime do not reflect guilty court rates, do they represent a moral panic as conceptualized by Stanley Cohen (1972)?
- (3) Are folk devils associated with these moral panics, and/or is there evidence of a feminist backlash?

5.3 Methodology

This research seeks to answer these research questions using a mixed-methods approach. To answer the first question – how does the quantity of news articles about female youth crime or female violence compare to real crime trends – I conduct correlation analyses drawing on secondary data from the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) in Canada between the years of 1991/92 and 2011/12. I consider whether girls’ guilty court rates correlate with the number of news reports on girls’ crime over the same time period. To address the next two questions, about news reports, moral panics and folk devils, I conduct a content analysis of news reports on girls’ crime, and examine if and how these reports are gendered. For clarity, in the following subsections I describe the data and methods used separately.

5.3.1 Data

5.3.1.1 The Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS)

I utilized guilty court findings from the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) to assess trends in criminal behaviour over time. This data from the ICCS is better than that contained in the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) because it looks separately at female and male youth. The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics collects the ICCS data from governmental departments responsible for criminal courts (Statistics Canada, 2014). Intended to be a census, the ICCS is based on a cross-sectional design that includes both

pending and completed federal statute charges that are heard in provincial, territorial and superior courts (Statistics Canada, 2014). Aggregate data recorded include the “age and sex of the accused, case decisions, sentencing information regarding the length of prison and probation, and amount of fine, as well as case-processing indicators such as case elapsed time” (Statistics Canada, 2014). The first year available for statistical analysis is 1991/92; therefore this year is the starting point for both the media and quantitative investigation into female youth crime. The end point is 2011/12, the last year for which complete data is available.

In the ICCS, a case is defined as “all charges against the same person having one or more key overlapping court dates” (Statistics Canada, 2016). This research only uses the data on those cases where a final decision of guilty (a disposition¹¹ of guilt) has been made. If a young person was charged and found guilty of several crimes, only the most serious charge and decision are included in the ICCS leading to a possible underrepresentation of less serious charges, decisions and dispositions (D. of J. Government of Canada, 2002). It was decided that guilty dispositions (findings of guilt) were the best measure of crime and therefore provided a more accurate reflection of actual crime trends because it excludes anyone found innocent. Thus, the unit of analysis used in this study is most severe guilty verdict per person. I also acknowledge that guilty findings are not a perfect measure of crime rates as some innocent may be convicted, and some guilty may go free.

Female youths were defined as those between the ages of 12 and 17 to reflect youth as conceptualized by the Young Offenders Act (YOA) and the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA). Since some youth may be transferred to adult court, it is possible that the data contained in the ICCS underreport violent offences because these are the offences most likely to be transferred to adult court until 2003. As of 2003, with the introduction of the YCJA, youth between 12 and 17 remain in youth court, although they may receive adult sentences. The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS) does not provide data on

¹¹ Other dispositions include: acquittal, stayed, withdrawn, dismissed, or discharged.

adult sentences under the YCJA. Overall, an underestimation of youth court convictions for serious violent offences is likely in this data (Hiebert, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2014)

5.3.1.2 National Canadian Newspapers

To assess media accounts of girls' crime, I examined three popular national newspapers with varying political affiliations and viewpoints. Newspapers were chosen for pragmatic reasons because they provide an understanding of girls and crime that is similar to other news media outlets (i.e., television, radio). Also, newspapers, unlike television or other sources, are readily accessible, and searchable with online databases. The data analyzed were comprised of newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to the editor obtained from the Factiva and Lexus Nexus online databases. Both Factiva and Lexus Nexus are research and informational tools that provides transcripts of newspapers and other forms of media. In total, three newspapers are included in the study and were chosen based on three criteria: their "agenda-setting influence", their wide circulation, and their differing political perspectives (Johnson, Henderson, Pedersen, & Stonecipher, 2011). Each of the newspapers reaches a daily audience of more than 200,000 people, and hence each has the potential to influence a significant number of people. Further, some of the papers are more conservative, while others more liberal. Media depictions may be different in conservative as compared to liberal venues, so considering a cross-section of newspapers was deemed valuable.

The first newspaper chosen was *The Globe and Mail* (whose predecessor the *Globe* dates back to 1844), because it reaches more than 320,000 people in its circulation. It represents the second largest daily newspaper and the largest national newspaper. The *Globe and Mail* is largely considered to be a centrist newspaper with right-wing leanings. The second newspaper identified for this study was *The National Post*, which reaches more than 200,000 people daily. This newspaper originated in 1998 and has quickly gained the reputation of a conservative right-wing newspaper. Prior to 1998, the newspaper was known as the *Financial Post*. News articles from this paper under both names are included in the study, but referred to as *The National Post* throughout this

paper. The final newspaper that was included in the analysis was *The Toronto Star* (originated in 1892), which reaches more than 300,000 people. This is the largest daily newspaper in Canada and is often considered to be politically left of center. One of the limitations of choosing these three newspapers was that each of them are based out of Toronto, Ontario, which likely impacted the stories that were presented. The *Toronto Star*, in particular, purposely maintains an ear to the ground when it comes to issues that affect Toronto. Although the content analysis did show favouritism for Toronto-based stories, each of the papers discuss both provincial and national political debates, legislation, and specific criminal cases from outside this locale.

The three newspapers were analyzed from January 1st, 1991 to December 31st, 2012. The year 1991 was chosen because Statistics Canada began releasing Youth Court Survey data, now contained in the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS), in 1991/92. The goal was to ascertain whether media reports varied along with real crime trends. This date made a good starting point as it fell in between the enactment of the Young Offenders Act (YOA) of 1984 and its replacement, the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) in 2003. The end date was also chosen to correspond with available ICCS data.

To find the newspaper articles, four separate searches of the online Factiva and Lexus Nexus databases were conducted. The following search terms were used: ‘Youth Crime’; ‘Youth Violence’; ‘Girl Crime’; ‘Girl Violence.’ Each of the three newspapers was searched for these key terms separately. The study contains a slight sampling bias towards identifying youth crime as violent, given the search terms. The justification for keeping the search terms that included ‘violence’ was the high degree of overlap with articles revealed in other searches. Many of the articles on ‘youth crime’ focus on or highlight ‘youth violence.’ The searches produced a few thousand articles published in the three newspapers. Initially, the names of youth legislation (‘Juvenile Delinquency Act’; ‘Young Offenders Act’; ‘Youth Criminal Justice Act’) were also included in the search, resulting in almost double the results. The decision was made to eliminate these searches from this analysis, because they did not yield additional articles of interest. Articles identified either duplicated ones already identified, or focused on political platforms and other issues not relevant to the study.

Once the articles from the three newspapers were identified using the key search terms, they were reviewed to determine their suitability for the study. First, all articles identified were crosschecked and duplicates removed. Second, the articles were read to determine if the articles were in fact about girls' involvement with crime. 'Youth' was defined as those between the ages 12 and 17 because this age grouping represents those punishable under the current youth criminal justice legislation. In some instances, articles conflated youth crime with crimes perpetrated by those in their early twenties. These articles were not included in the analysis since they did not focus on youth as defined by criminal justice legislation. Additionally, many of the articles were not about 'youth' and merely mentioned the terms in passing, for instance, when describing a particular political party member's electoral platform (i.e., youth crime, health care, education etc.). Other times, the articles contained too little content for analysis. For example, articles might only contain one line about youth crime. Only articles that were at least three sentences long were included to ensure there was sufficient material for analysis. Furthermore, articles that were not primarily about youth crime or youth violence, but about poverty, education, health care, or mental health were also excluded.

Editorials and letters to the editor were included in the analysis if they met the other requirements just mentioned. They were included in the analysis for two reasons. First, sometimes it was unclear within the newspapers which articles were editorials, letters to the editor or official news stories because each of the newspapers contained several inconsistencies when documenting the bibliographic information. For instance, above the titles for each article, many were labeled with 'NEWS,' 'EDITORIAL,' or 'LETTERS TO EDITOR;' however, not all of the articles were labeled and some did not designate authorship resulting in uncertainties regarding what type of article it may have been. The decision to keep these articles, including the ones not properly labeled was based upon the notion that the opinions and statements they contained were both a reflection of public opinion, and could influence public perception.

Of the 1094 articles about youth crime, 176 met the criteria mentioned above. Thus, 176 news articles were classified as either mentioning girls' involvement in crime or being about female youth crime in Canada.

5.3.2 Analysis

5.3.2.1 Quantitative

To determine if the frequency of female guilty findings correlated with news publications about girls' crime, I used the Spearman's rho non-parametric statistic. Spearman's rho was chosen because neither guilty trends nor frequency of female youth crime news reports were normally distributed. Specifically, Spearman's rho was used to assess whether the numbers of news articles published each year on girls correlated with the ICCS guilty court verdicts for female youth each year.

Spearman's rho or Spearman's rank order correlation ranks responses on each variable (news articles or guilty verdicts per year) for each of the 21 years: the highest number of newspapers in a given year is ranked one, as is the highest number of guilty verdicts in a given year. Counts for each variable in other years are ranked in descending order. The Spearman's rho correlation determines how closely these variable rankings coincide. In a perfect positive correlation, the rankings would be identical, and years with high numbers of newspaper articles would also have high numbers of guilty verdicts. If the rankings do not coincide at all, we would expect a correlation of 0.

5.3.2.2 Qualitative

Content analysis of the news articles began with a spreadsheet constructed in Microsoft Word because of the program's ability to search text, highlight important points, and create comment bubbles in the margins. A "pragmatic variant" of grounded theory was utilized for the coding process (Barbour, 2001). According to Barbour (2001), few scholars are able to use a completely pure version of grounded theory when undertaking the coding process because once the literature review has taken place, researchers are likely to have an idea of some of the themes that might be present within the data. Without having a predetermined and static coding scheme, codes and themes are still able to emerge from the data (Johnson et al., 2011). An initial list of potential codes and coding categories were determined prior to the analysis. The coding categories were used

to group like-codes together. The overarching coding categories were: youth crime/violence; girlhood criminality; causes of youth crime/violence; solutions to youth crime; youth crime legislation/policy/political agendas; moral panic and shocking cases; feminism/gender; statistics/experts. Each coding category contained several subcodes that were used to organize the data and analyze potential themes. After each article was read over once, codes that emerged from the data were added to the categories to arrive at an overall coding scheme.

The vast majority of articles focused explicitly or implicitly on boys' crime and violence. This present paper only focuses on those articles that specifically mentioned crime among girls: 176 articles were identified as either being directly about girlhood criminality or at least making specific reference to girls' involvement in criminality. For the purposes of this paper, additional divisions along the lines of class and race within this group are not presented; this is a topic for future analysis.

To assess whether news articles reflected a moral panic, Cohen's (1972) moral panic typology was utilized. I explored whether the five primary characteristics of a moral panic (as discussed in chapter 4) -- concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility-- are evident. Here, I considered whether the moral panics were shaped by gender. Did the moral panic focus on girls' crime, or girls' femininity? My focus was especially on whether there were female folk devils associated with these moral panics. Further, I considered whether there was evidence of a feminist backlash in news reports, as Chesney-Lind (2006) has indicated.

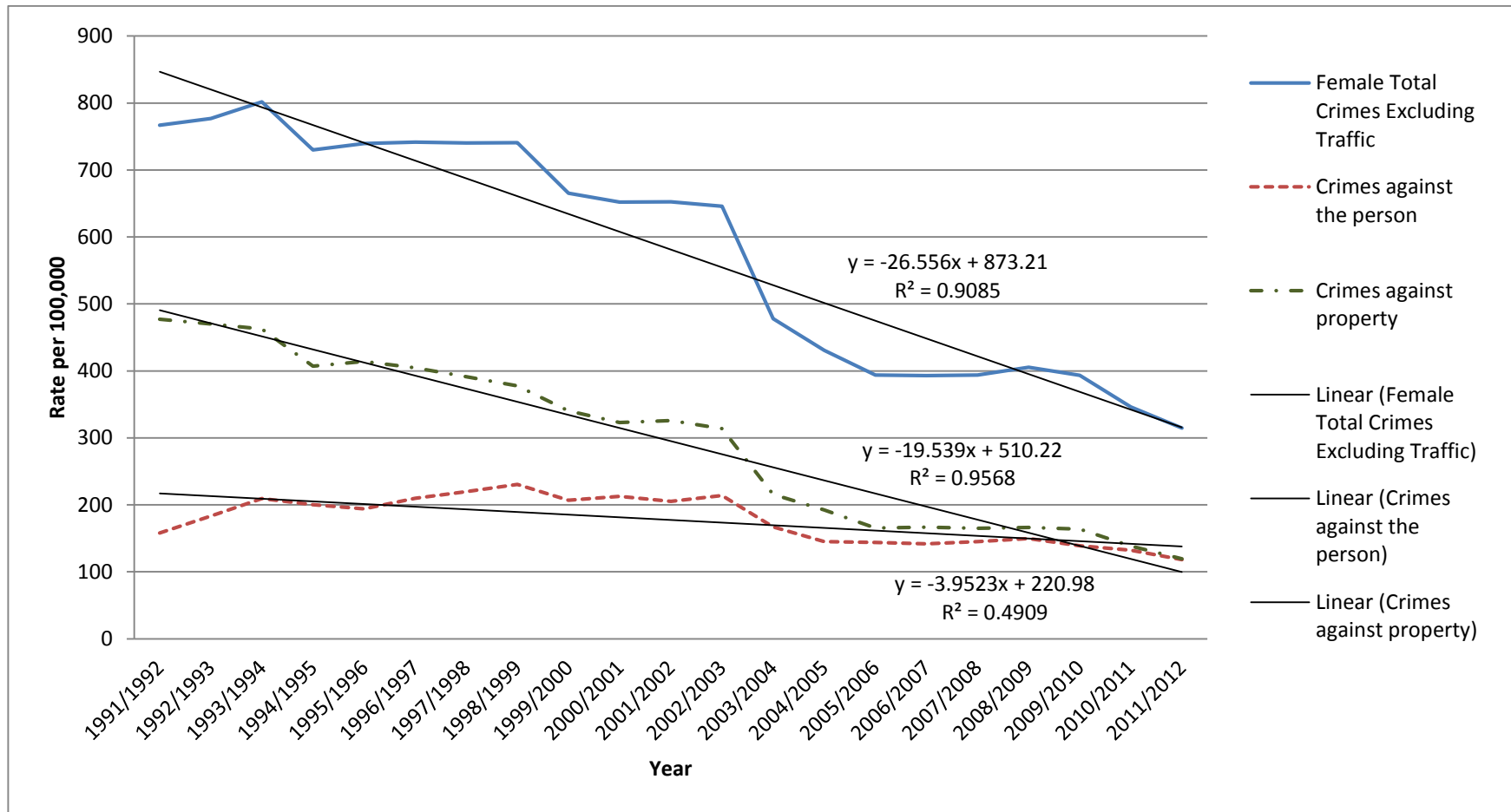
5.4 Results

Despite the media's insistence that youth crime is on the rise, youth crime has been declining relatively steadily since the early 1990s (as seen in chapters 3 and 4). Figure 5-1 displays the guilty dispositions for female young offenders in Canada between 1991/92 and 2011/12 for total offences, property offences (non-violent) and crimes against the person (violent). To better see the intricacies of the crimes against the person (violent

crimes) trends, Figure 5-2 reflects the same violent crime data from Figure 5-1, but using an enlarged scale. Guilty court findings among girls declined relatively steadily as shown in Figure 5-1. While the overall youth court trends declined for girls, convictions for violent offences remained fairly steady until the early 2000s, after which they declined (Figure 5-2). For roughly two decades, guilty findings for violent offences among girls in youth court remained relatively consistent, with the exception of some relatively minor increases and decreases. As mentioned in Chapter 3, prior to the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) in 2003, there had been a slight increase in the numbers of girls found guilty of violent offences. After the YCJA's implementation, there was a decline, likely as a result of the diversionary tactics used by justice authorities to reduce the numbers of young people in Canada's criminal justice system. In order to use diversionary tactics, the criminal activities in which a young person engaged had to be an anomaly and minor in nature. The drop after the YCJA likely does not reflect a significant drop in youth crime, but rather the greater use of diversion and extrajudicial measures as others have stated (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2010; Bell, 2015; Sprott & Doob, 2009).

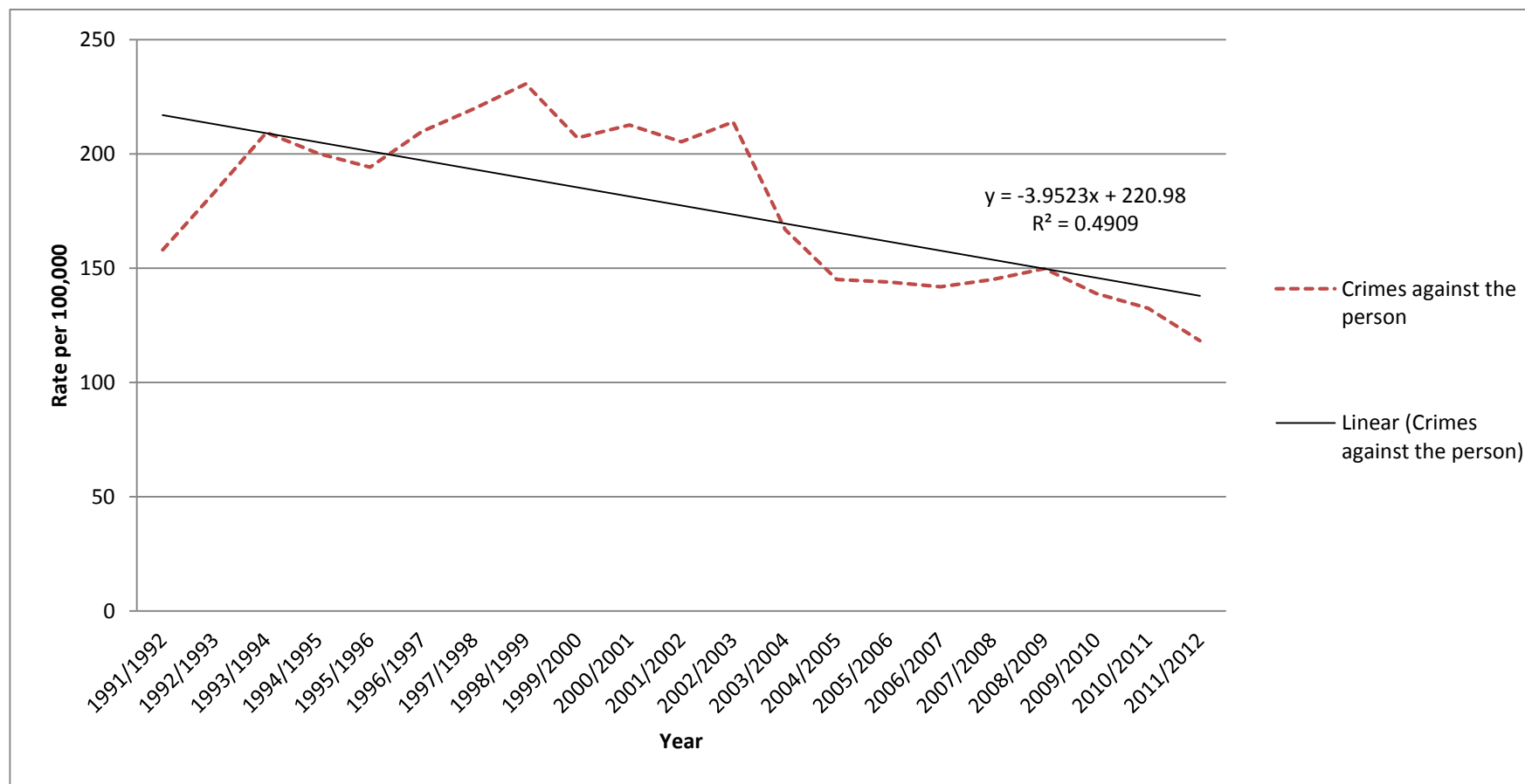
Figure 5-3 represents the numbers of stories that mention girlhood criminality specifically. Visually, it can be seen that the peaks and valleys shown in Figure 5-3 are not reflected in the overall guilty court findings for all offences among female youth offenders between the years 1991/92 and 2011/12 from Figures 5-1 and 5-2. Nonetheless there are some similarities. Articles on girls' crime peak in 1998, and there is a corresponding trend evident in Figure 5-2: violent crime guilty verdicts peak in 1998-99. However, news articles are also high in 2000, when there is no corresponding peak in crime rates. Moreover, girls' guilty court verdicts peak again in 2002/03, a year when there are very few articles published on girls' crime in newspapers.

Figure 5-1: ICCS Trends of Guilty Female Youth Court Findings between 1991/92 & 2011/12 per 100,000



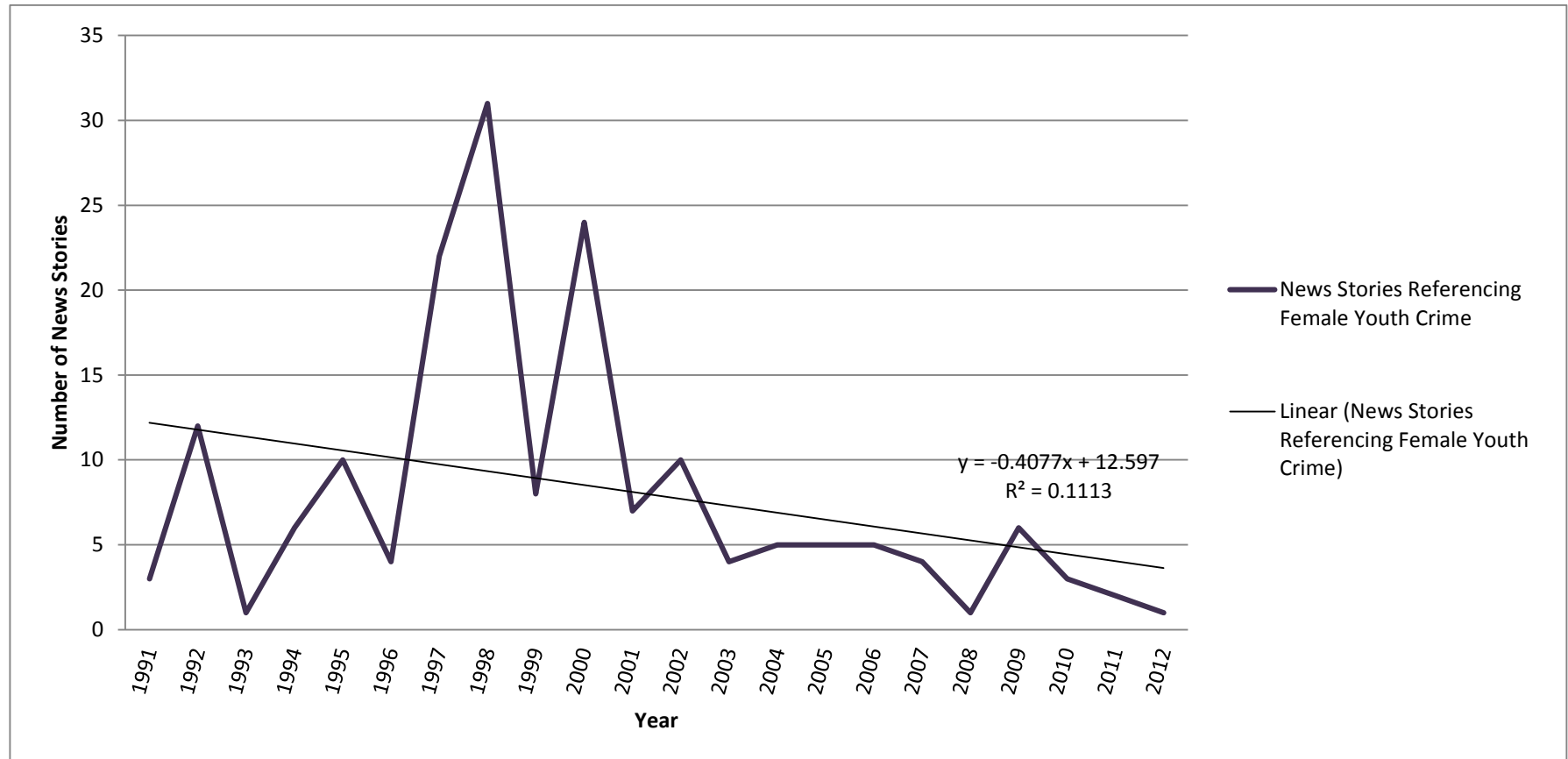
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Integrated Criminal Court Survey

Figure 5-2: ICCS Trends of Violent Guilty Female Youth Court Findings between 1991/92 & 2011/12 per 100,000



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Integrated Criminal Court Survey

Figure 5-3: National News Stories that reference Female Youth Crime between 1991 & 2014



5.4.1 Newspaper Articles and ICCS Data

The correlation analysis finds no statistical relationship between overall criminal convictions and the number of news articles on girls' crime. This holds true, for the number of property offence convictions and total number of news articles on girls' crime. However, there is a significant positive relationship between the number of guilty findings for crimes committed against a person (violent offences) and the number of news stories on female youth crime ($r_s = 0.58$, $p = 0.005$). This suggests that news articles on girls' crime vary in accordance with real violent crime trends. At the same time, the correlation does not confirm causation, and it does not preclude that other factors could explain the relationship. Overall, these results suggest that, except for violent crimes, news reports do not correspond with real crime trends. I now turn to the qualitative analysis of these news reports to assess the depictions of crime contained within them. Specifically, I seek answers to the final two research questions: do media reports on girls' crime reflect moral panics, and are there folk devils associated with these moral panics?

5.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Figure 5-3, which represents the numbers of stories that mention girls and crime, shows a peak in news reporting on girls' total crime in the late 1990s. Content analysis of articles during 1997 and 1998 revealed that a few high-profile cases are responsible for the spike. In 1997, the beating of Reena Virk by six girls and two boys, and her subsequent murder by 15 year old Kelly Ellard and 16 year old Warren Glowatski, was the single most referenced criminal case within the entire sample: 64 news stories either focused directly on this case or mentioned it in conjunction with other female youth offenders. Journalists paid little attention to the male accused and focused almost entirely on the girls responsible for the crimes. In fact, his name only appeared in 19 news stories, two of which, were about his trial. At his sentencing, the judge described him as a "troubled, immature young man [who has had] difficulty dealing with the breakdown of

relationships [in his] family” and is in need of counseling (*Girard, The Toronto Star*, 1999). The remainder of stories that mentioned his name were about the trials of Ellard or the other girls involved in the beating.

Articles published on the Virk case spanned more than a decade, between 1997 and 2010. The other case to draw media attention in 1998 was a ‘reign of terror’ orchestrated by Toronto girl gang called the Spadina Girls. According to newspaper articles, the Spadina Girls were comprised of girls from two collegiate high schools in Toronto, Ontario. In January of 1998, five fifteen-year-old girls from the gang were arrested for crimes including assault, extortion, and uttering a death threat. The focus on the Spadina Girls reflected fears of gang violence more generally, that were high in the 1990s. The Spadina Girls were referenced in eight articles out of the 18 that mentioned girls’ involvement with gangs.

As documented elsewhere (Chapter 4; Kilty, 2007), the Virk case spurred a moral panic. Cohen (1972) argued that moral panics are evident when media accounts demonstrate concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. In news articles, *concern* was demonstrated through the inclusion of ‘objective’ commentary from experts and official statistics to suggest a growing trend. Experts with a broad range of expertise, including criminal justice professionals, psychologists, and school officials, among others provided *consensus*, that girls were engaged in more crime than ever before. For instance, in one article a Canadian forensic psychologist and expert on female serial killers commented on Virk’s murder saying: “[i]t really does threaten the rules of how we are living in society” when girls take part in violence (Mitchell, *The Globe and Mail*, 1997). A Canadian professor, criminologist, and author suggests that girls are getting more violent, shockingly so, and media tells girls that “[w]hatever you do, look sexy doing it” (Cox, *The Toronto Star*, 1997). Police sergeant and head of Victoria’s police gang unit says he sees violence at the hands of girls every day, despite the awareness of girls’ involvement in crime spurred by Virk’s murder. When asked: “Is violence occurring among girls? ... Is it a cause of concern?” he would respond “[a]bsolutely” (Dickson, *The National Post*, 2005). In the same article, a psychologist is quoted as saying “we tend to turn a blind eye to aggression in girls,” but we need to change this in light of cases like

that of the Virk murder (Dickson, *The National Post*, 2005). In articles mentioning crime and violence among girls there was an identifiable thread of *hostility* suggesting that girls' crime was new, virtually unheard of previously. Girl violence was viewed as threatening the entire social order. Violence among girls was described as arising without warning, "[m]any incidents are unprovoked. There's some perceived slight and people are punched in the face right out of the blue" (Dickson, *The National Post*, 2005). These atypical behaviours were cast as all-too-typical, and condemned. A Toronto Detective Sergeant and youth coordinator states that although "[a] lot more boys get charged with offences ... what's disturbing is that girls are catching up, and so too is the level of violence, which was unseen before 1990" (Teotonio, *The Toronto Star*, 2002). Claims made in news reports were disproportional to real crime trends which, as we have seen, demonstrate only a small increase in the 1990s, before declining.

Where the Virk case differs from other moral panics is respecting *volatility*. According to the literature, most moral panics peak and dissipate relatively quickly; however, the Virk case was remembered and recounted again and again. Overall, it appears there was a moral panic surrounding Virk's murder.

Were there also folk devils associated with this moral panic around girl's violence? As we have seen, previous research has suggested that news reports of girls and crime reveal a feminist backlash (Chesney-Lind, 2006), and girls' involvement in crime has been blamed on the feminist movement (Adler, 1975). Despite few articles written on female youths' involvement with crime between 1991 and 2014, the content of the articles often presented their crimes as especially horrific and disastrous. This research finds support for both the existence of female-centered folk devils and a backlash against changing social structures. A close examination of the media coverage on girls' involvement in crime reveals two, linked folk devils. First, girls' participation in crime is seen as signaling the arrival of a 'new' kind of girl, one that appears feminine, but is devoid of girlhood innocence. Second, girls are seen to have embraced masculinity, as if it were a bad habit that could be picked up in a modern society. These discourses reflect not only concerns with youth crime, but social anxiety about changing gender roles. The following two sections explore these female folk devils in greater detail.

5.4.3 The Modern Girl Folk Devil: Femininity Under Attack

In news articles, modern girls were said to be a new breed of females that refused to be docile and passive like those of past generations. For instance, in a *Globe and Mail* article, a journalist informs readers that girls are no longer made from sugar and spice as they have become “ruthless, volatile and brutal” (Vincent, *The Globe and Mail*, 1995a); “they’re women of the nineties and they’re asserting themselves in a very violent way” (Vincent, *The Globe and Mail*, 1995a). In this article and others, girls are said to be transforming, and behaving in ways that are unimaginable to those raised in an earlier time with different societal expectations. After Virk’s murder, a journalist paints the following picture:

IMAGINE this: a gaggle of junior high-school girls, carrying satchels and sporting Gap shirts, beating one another to death. It's hard to picture, isn't it? It's so startling that it's almost absurd -- a weird, dissonant picture that we can't quite paint (Pearson, *The Globe and Mail*, 1997, emphasis in original).

Growing fear about female criminality was oftentimes linked to societal changes and the changing gender roles for women and girls. Unlike their predecessors, modern teen girls traveled in packs or “gaggle[s]” (Pearson, *The Globe and Mail*, 1997), manipulated those around them like “puppet masters” (“Evil must be taken into account,” *The Globe and Mail*, 2009), rejected traditional facets of femininity and had little to no regard for society and those around them.

Ironically, these articles suggested that gender roles were being transformed, while they simultaneously reinforced age-old stereotypes about femininity. Like Eve in the Garden of Eden, girls appeared innocent, but they sowed the seeds of destruction. Female bullies were called “poisonous” (Crawford, *The Toronto Star*, 1994, p.A4), while girl violence was labeled as “venomous” (Carmichael, *The Globe and Mail*, 2005, p.S3). Girls were said to cause “reign[s] of terror” in arcades (Duncanson & Rankin, *The Toronto Star*, 1998, p.A1) and in gangs, even when they shockingly appeared to be “tiny and delicate” (Shephard, *The Toronto Star*, 1998b, p.A8). Janus-faced, girls were said to look innocent, but they were malevolent underneath. An example of girls accused of “punching, kicking

and stomping other girls” exemplifies the way in which these dangerous girls ‘hide’ in plain view:

The tough girls of Melfort don't seem so intimidating when they're giggling in the bathroom, putting on their makeup. In their sweatshirts and blue jeans, they look like any other attractive teens, chewing gum and occasionally twirling it around their fingers (G. Smith, *The Globe and Mail*, 2004, p.F3).

Underneath, though, some of these girls were “pure evil” due to their ability to manipulate males to commit murder for them (“*Evil must be taken into account,*” *The Globe and Mail*, 2009).

Articles in this period documented the emergence of a new dangerous female. A 2008 article from *The Toronto Star* exclaims that while girls may have previously gotten into “catfights,” they are now turning to atypical violent female role models like Lara Croft or Uma Thurman’s *Kill Bill* character for motivation to carry out extraordinarily violent actions (Zerbisias, 2008, *The Toronto Star*, p.L01). This particular news article was not the only one to suggest that violent female media characters were to blame for girls’ violence. According to several journalists, girls learn their violent behaviours from violent role models in films such as *Basic Instinct*, *Thelma and Louise*, *Disclosure* (Dunley, 1995, *The Toronto Star*, p.C4), and *G.I. Jane* (Pearson, *The Globe and Mail*, 1997, p.D3). Edgy popstars like Madonna and Alanis Morissette were also blamed for telling girls it is okay “to be demonstrably angry” (Pearson, 1997, *The Globe and Mail*, p.D3). Violent behaviour was tied with feminism: crime reflected girls “asserting their independence” (Vincent, 1995a, *The Globe and Mail*, p.A12).

With such role models and a new feminist ethic, girls were said to become violent over minor quibbles, from purses to boyfriends (Pearson, *The Globe and Mail*, 1997; Zerbisias, *The Toronto Star*, 2008). The overall message was that today, young women might just “beat someone up for no apparent reason” (“Girls gone violent,” 2007, *The Globe and Mail*, p.A16). Such stories portrayed the ‘new girl’ as maintaining traditional feminine interests – fashion and boys – but acting in violent ways to achieve their goals. These women were dangerous and manipulative. They threatened to undermine the

current social order. Overall, news reports suggested that girls were inherently and traditionally non-violent, but that social change had distorted women's nature and created 'bad girls' who harmed others.

5.4.4 The 'Girls will be Boys' Folk Devil: Femininity as the New Masculinity

In some media accounts the problem was not so much changing femininity, but rather girls' adoption of masculine traits. Throughout the period investigated here, articles argued that girls were behaving more like boys. For instance, one journalist stated, "so girls will be boys. They, too, resort to justice with a fist" (*Zerbisias, The Toronto Star*, 2008, p.L01). Another discussed an anti-social young woman who hated other girls and was said to seek masculine power because she "wore a tie" (Porter, 2010, *The Toronto Star*, p.GT2). In the following quote it is suggested that girls becoming masculine is par for the course in the 1990s:

In 1997, in your average high school, girls have gotten hip to their capacity for aggression. Instead of engaging in slander, rumour and ostracism (although that still goes on), some girls are trying on the masculine style of direct in-your-face confrontation. Why? Probably because girls are thinking: It's okay now, if you're female, to be demonstrably angry (Pearson, 1997, *The Globe and Mail*, p. D3).

In this excerpt the author suggests there were traditional ways for girls to be mean – rumour and ostracism – but now girls have moved beyond these 'feminine' tactics to embrace masculine tactics including direct violence.

A 1995 *Globe and Mail* article entitled "Are women becoming as violent as men?" makes an explicit link between violence and feminism, asking "is female violence the fruit of emancipation?" (Mitchell, 1995, *The Globe and Mail*, p.A5). Girls are said to be catching up to boys in committing crime: "[g]irls are the fastest-growing group of violent offenders in the country" (Pearson, 1997, *The Globe and Mail*, p. D3). Authors discuss a shrinking gender gap between girls and boys with respect to criminality, arguing that girls are utilizing violence in the same ways boys are: a "lot more boys get charged with

offences but what's disturbing is that girls are catching up, and so too is the level of violence, which was unseen before 1990" according to the youth crime coordinator for the Toronto police (Teotonio, 2002, *The Toronto Star*, P. LI11). Girls "like their male counterparts, are increasingly organizing themselves into violent gangs (Vincent, *The Globe and Mail*, 1995b, p.A10). In these gangs, girls are "fighting with knives and stealing" (Teotonio, *The Toronto Star*, 2002). Articles quote experts to suggest that girls are becoming more like boys.

Some articles go further to suggest that girls are not becoming just as violent as boys, but may be surpassing them: girls are said to be "vicious" and even "more ruthless and aggressive than their male counterparts" (Vincent, 1995a, *The Globe and Mail*, p.A1). When involved in gangs, the public was warned that girls fight more "fiercely" than male gang members (Shephard, 1998a, *The Toronto Star*, p.A1). Girls were depicted as so threatening that high school teachers were said to live in constant fear of angry girls and declared them to be more unruly and difficult to control than young men (Vincent, 1995b, *The Globe and Mail*, p.A10). Some even suggested that there had been a complete gender role reversal with girls no longer holding the gentler disposition due to the greater amounts of "brutality" girls inflict on others (Smith, 2004, *The Globe and Mail*, p.F3).

Whether girls were portrayed in news articles as just as violent as boys, more violent than boys, or as dangerous women, girlhood was defined as problematic. A distinction was made between mild "normal" girls – often depicted as a relic of the past – and the new violent girl. Girls who transgressed gender boundaries, through their involvement in crime, were labeled deviant. They were 'nasty girls,' 'bad girls,' 'girls in groups/gangs,' or 'violent girls.' Although statistics show that girls' crime is statistically rare compared to that committed by boys, and crime by girls is not on the rise, media reports demonized girls, casting them as a threat to the existing social order. These abject females, or 'bad girls,' are depicted as folk devils that society seeks to not only identify, but control via the family and criminal justice system.

5.4.5 Quelling the ‘Bad Girl’ while Ignoring their Plight

The creation of the ‘bad girl’ folk devil in news articles provides a target for social control efforts. Not only does the existence of the folk devil become reified as a real threat, but also it allows for the coming together of various social actors to quash the danger. An array of articles on girls’ criminality affirmed the existence of the problem of girls’ violence. School superintendents in Scarborough remarked on how “[m]ore females are involved in violent activity than ever before” (Boyle, 1992, *The Toronto Star*, p. SD1) while police constables in Laval pondered, “is [offending among girls] out of control? It’s hard to say... But everyone agrees that we have to do something to curb it” (Campbell, Grange, Cernetig, Ha, & Galt, 1997, *The Globe and Mail*, p.A1). Another news story citing data from Statistics Canada explains that “young women are making up a growing proportion of the caseload, comprising 21 per cent in 1998-99, up from 18 per cent in 1992-93. Their numbers grew for every type of crime, including violent crimes” (Carey, 2000, *The Toronto Star*, NE03). Toronto-based researchers are quoted as saying that “although the percentage [of violent girls] seems statistically small, the ripple effect... can be extensive. Their hostility in the playground and disruptions in class can affect most students and staff... girls can be equally violent” (Teotonio, 2002, *The Toronto Star*, LI11). High profile cases, like those involving the Spadina Girls, provided further evidence. One article exclaimed that at least five of the 180 gangs in Toronto were comprised solely of girls and that they even came from Catholic high schools (Shephard, 1998a, *The Toronto Star*, A1). Experts agreed that “girls are committing more crimes... and the level of violence is escalating. The number of girls charged with violent criminal offences increased 179 per cent between 1987 and 1997” (Carey, 1998, *The Toronto Star*, p. A3). Inflated and inaccurate statistical evidence was marshaled to make the case that girls’ violence was an increasing and significant social problem.

Concern for girls’ violence, and the belief that there was a pressing need to curb it, can be seen not only in the opinions expressed by criminal justice or traditional authoritative figures, like police officers, teachers, and psychologists, but also victims and perpetrators. Quotes from victims and ‘bad girls’ themselves were sometimes provided to prove the existence of this social problem, and to reveal a glimpse into an unexplored subculture

where girls were out of control. For instance, one article depicts a soft spoken “pale redhead” explaining how girls are “scrappier” than boys; she had been threatened just weeks prior to the interview (G. Smith, *The Globe and Mail*, 2004, P.F3).

While the tone of the articles is often panicked, many do sprinkle real quotes and facts throughout. Nonetheless, journalists claim that while the real crime numbers are small, the danger is all too real. Girls are portrayed as causing terror and chaos, even though official statistics tell a different tale. Whether the news stories on the dangers of female youth crime and violence were published in the early to late 1990s, 2000s, or 2010s, the female folk devils remained the same. In each example throughout the twenty-one year span of the study, violent and criminal girls were viewed as non-traditional, unfeminine or destructively feminine, and at times masculine.

5.5 Discussion and Conclusion

Research on girls’ involvement in crime has previously revealed the existence of moral panics in media accounts. It has been argued that these panics distort and obscure real crime trends. This present study both confirms and challenges these views. On the one hand, media accounts of girls’ crime are correlated with real violent crime trends, as measured by guilty court findings. Media accounts and violent crime rates peak in the late 1990s and then generally decline after. It is also true, however, that analysis of news articles on girls’ crime points to considerable divergence. Even when girls’ crime rates are low, and decreasing, media accounts portray girl crime as being on the rise.

Newspaper articles create two ‘bad girl’ folk devils, in which girls are alternately cast as being deviously feminine – looking innocent on the surface, but vicious underneath – or increasingly masculine, beginning to outdo boys with their aggression and violence.

These accounts cultivate fears about the feminist movement, casting gender equality as a trend rendering women increasingly masculine and troublesome. Based on these findings, it seems reasonable to conclude that the moral panic revealed is as much about gender roles, as it is about crime.

The two female folk devils described above and the moral panic centered on girls' violence provide examples of what Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2010) refer to as the institutionalization of a moral panic. Institutionalization occurs when the moral panic remains over time and is tied to social structures. The 'institutionalization and routinization' of the female folk devil meant that this threat was persistent over the twenty-three years of the study. While many moral panics end soon after they occur, the concern over girls' crime, and the folk devils constructed, appear in articles published throughout the period analyzed. In this case, the moral panic centered on the transgression of femininity and the reinforcement of traditional gender norms. The crimes and acts of violence were shocking because they were committed by girls, showing that the female-centered moral panic was more about the transgression of femininity than the crimes themselves. Nostalgic notions of femininity were time-and-time again juxtaposed with images of 'modern' violent girls. The transgression was portrayed as a threat to society because they challenged the gendered status quo.

These findings provide support for previous research into gender, crime, and media. While feminism does not appear linked to rising crime rates for girls – as Adler (1975) famously contended – this fear lingers in news accounts. Feminism is seen as destructive because it challenges traditional gender roles. There is clear evidence of a feminist backlash (Chesney-Lind, 2006). Chesney-Lind (2006) suggests that the United States has been experiencing a feminist backlash motivated by an 'energized right wing' that has been attempting to scale back the rights awarded to women and people of colour. Using reactionary politics, dominant social forces have fought against social change to maintain the institutionalization of traditional gender, race, and class inequalities. Criminal justice policies are used as mechanisms to maintain the status quo through the creation of the dangerous 'Other' or 'bad girl' folk devils. News articles both implicitly and explicitly blamed social change, including the feminist movement, for the emergence of what they see as the 'nasty girl' or 'bad girl'. They cite "experts" who claim that girls (and feminism) are emerging social problems, regardless of the overwhelming evidence that girl crime is not on the rise, and is not particularly problematic.

According to Males (2010), the demonization of girls in media trivializes the real dangers and issues facing girls in North America. For instance, female victimization is underemphasized in news accounts. Research has revealed that aggressive and violent girls are likely to have experienced maltreatment, including the exposure of family violence, physical and emotional violence, and sexual violence (Moretti, Odgers, Reppucci, Aggression Project Team, & Catherine, 2015). Further, girls are more likely to be victims of violence, than to perpetrate violence (Chesney-Lind et al., 2010; Males, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2013, Statistics Canada, 2015). For instance, according to Statistics Canada (2013), 1,207 women aged 15 years and older per 100,000 were victims of violence in 2011, which is slightly higher than for men (1,151 per 100,000). Further, these media accounts can obscure the fact that men are responsible for most violence committed against women: of the police-reported incidents, 83% of all violence committed against women was committed by men (Statistics Canada, 2013). Men are also likely to be the perpetrator when the victim is male; 76% of the accused were male according to Statistics Canada (2013).

Girls between the ages of 12 and 17 are particularly vulnerable. They are six times more likely to experience violence than females under the age of 12 and almost twice as likely as those over 18. The most recent report from Statistics Canada (2013) suggests that in 2011, girls between 12 and 17 were 8% more likely to experience violence than boys in the same age range. While girls below the age of 12 are more likely to be violently victimized by a family member, once they enter the 12 to 17 age range this changes, as casual acquaintances become more likely to perpetrate violence. Of these casual acquaintances, 39% were other girls under the age of 18.

The focus on girls as perpetrators of violence is out of proportion with real crime trends, and it demonizes women, obscuring the ways in which women and girls are marginalized in society. Focusing on women as perpetrators while ignoring their victimization, creates a one-dimensional, inaccurate portrayal of women's experiences. The existence of female violence or disobedience appears to generate so much concern because it represents a threat to the operation of patriarchy and the institutionalization of gender norms, resulting in a 'feminist backlash.'

Future research should continue to compare media accounts with real-world trends, in order to produce an improved picture of social reality. At the same time, it will be important to move beyond studies focused on gender, to adopt an intersectional approach. Just as the moral panics about 'bad' or violent girls were not so much about criminality, but rather the transgression and violations of feminine norms, they are also about dominant beliefs regarding race and class. Lastly, a parallel analysis of the gendered portrayals of male youth in media accounts is needed. Like femininity and crime, masculinity and crime should be explored further with an intersectional lens.

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Chapter 6

6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This dissertation explored representations of youth crime in Canada. The study brought together three strands of research on youth crime that have heretofore been separate: research on crime trends, media representations of crime, and trends in youth crime legislation. Using a mixed-methods approach -- and drawing on historical scholarly works, official governmental crime and court statistics, and national Canadian newspapers -- I examined representations and depictions of youth crime in Canada. Throughout, I adopted a feminist lens to examine how depictions of crime trends and young offenders are shaped by gender. Although I was not able to adopt a fully intersectional lens, given the nature of the data, I have also tried to highlight the importance of class and race to shaping youth crime laws, and representations of youth crime in the media. Despite the presence of clear moral panics surrounding youth crime, this analysis has shown that youth crime is not increasing, and that young men's crime continues to outpace girls' crime. Somewhat surprisingly media accounts do correlate with violent crime trends, numerically, although the content of these articles often runs counter to these trends. Media accounts of boys' and girls' criminal activity is strongly shaped by gender, as well as by class and race. Study findings have also highlighted the extent to which crime trends have shaped legislative outcomes, and how legislative change, in turn shapes crime trends.

In this discussion chapter, I provide an overview of the main research questions and key findings, first by focusing on chapters 2 and 3, and subsequently chapters 4 and 5. Then, I consider my contributions to the field. Last, I outline the study limitations, and implications for future research.

6.2 Chapters 2 and 3: Secondary Data Analysis

Chapter 2 provided an historical overview of changing definitions of youth, crime and delinquency, and legislation addressing youth crime in Canada. In this chapter, I showed how justice authorities and moral entrepreneurs shaped and responded to youth crime legislation over time. Historical trends in youth crime in Canada dating from the early late 1800s and 1900s to the current era were examined. It was found that ideologies and theories of crime greatly influenced legislation passed from the late 1800s to the present. However, what remained consistent was the way morality was used to gage proper behaviour of youth in Canada. Assumptions regarding morality shaped how criminal justice authorities responded to youth and affected the ways legislation was created. Also important were racism and class biases. Legislation sought to reform the underprivileged, by socializing them to middle-class values and behaviour expectations. Crime and court trends observed may have much to do with changing conceptions and definitions of morality, youth, and criminality.

Chapter 3 focused on youth court statistics, specifically conviction rates, to combat contradictory and dated hypotheses concerning whether or not youth crime in Canada increased between the years 1991/92¹² and 2011/12. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, this research was inspired by media depictions of criminalized girls, which suggested that violence among girls had gotten considerably worse over time. Research on youth crime in general has been divided about whether youth crime rates have increased, decreased, or remained stable over the past twenty-five years (Artz & Nicholson, 2002; Artz, 1998; Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009; Carrigan, 1991; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Faith, 2011; Pate, 1999; Reitsma-Street, 1999; Roberts & Doob, 1990; Sprott & Doob, 2009; Steffensmeier, Zhong, Ackerman, Schwartz, & Agha, 2006). This chapter sought to determine what the trends were once and for all. Additionally, I wanted to understand what impact changing youth crime

¹² The Integrated Criminal Courts Survey (ICCS), developed through the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics and Statistics Canada, is available as of 1991/92 and this is why the study primarily focused on data and news media from this year onward.

legislation had on violent and non-violent crime convictions trends for Canadian youth. The main research questions were as follows: First, are youth becoming more violent in Canada? Second, how do youth crime rates change over time, and what is the impact of the YJCA on youth crime? Third, how do youth court convictions vary by sex?

The analysis of court data found little support for claims that girls' were becoming more criminal and violent. Canadian court trends and severity index statistics between 1991/92 and 2011/12 all indicate that girls' overall conviction rates, as well as the severity of youth crime more generally, has decreased during the period studied, with minor statistical deviations. Also, between 1991/12 and 2011/12 the numbers of girls being convicted for violent crimes in Canada mostly decreased, although there were some slight increases in a few violent crimes. Increases in the crimes of 'uttering threats' and 'criminal harassment,' among both girls and boys, were documented in Chapter 3. These findings support and update the findings of Doob and Sprott (1998) who discuss how increases in minor types of assault are likely the result of anti-bullying strategies and enforcement. They caution that although increasing rates of violence may be concerning, the subjectiveness of criminal classifications of violence needs to be considered, especially because girls are more likely to commit minor violations even if they are considered violent (Doob & Sprott, 1998). In line with their arguments, the crimes of uttering threats and criminal harassment are two violent crimes that can encompass an array of bullying-like behaviours, not all of which include physical violence. Chesney-Lind, Morash and Irwin (2010) contend that definitions of violence and bullying differ for girls and boys and rates of girls' bullying-related offences are more likely to be the product of relational aggression¹³ that is distinctly different than more serious forms of aggression typically displayed by boys. The ways that girls and boys carry out violence differ based on societal expectations of gender; girls are more likely to carry out covert,

¹³ Relational aggression is defined as varying behaviours that have the intent to cause harm by ruining, disrupting, controlling, or manipulating relationships with others (Cameron-Pavlovic, 2011; Centifanti, Fanti, Thomson, Demetriou, & Anastassiou-Hadjicharalambous, 2015; Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2010; Vail, 2002).

or relational, aggression and this indirect form of violence is different than the types of violence carried out by boys (Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2010; Males, 2010). The varying definitions, and sometimes conflation, of bullying, aggression, and violence becomes a problem, since the terms can reflect very different behaviours. For instance, an aggressive act that hurts another could be the spreading of rumours and rolling one's eyes at another, or physical violence, assault, rape, and murder (Chesney-Lind et al., 2010). Girls' appear to be more likely to be charged for the former than the latter. Thus, crime categories can sometimes obscure important gender differences.

While acknowledging the seriousness of girls' aggression, Chesney-Lind and her colleagues (2010) found that the relational aggression used by girls could not be compared or deemed similar to physical violence, aggression or bullying. However, these behaviours among girls sparked great concern in the newspaper content analysis I conducted for this dissertation. If one were to be presented with statistics documenting increases in the crimes of uttering threats and criminal harassment, alongside media depictions of bad girls, one might believe the rhetoric being presented: girls' aggression and violence is increasing, and becoming comparable to, if not worse than boys' violent behaviours. As chapter 3 shows there is reason to be skeptical of such claims. Girls are not becoming more violent or criminal on average, and crime rates are declining among boys as well.

Overall, the findings of chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate the importance of placing justice statistics in context. Small increases or decreases in rates appeared much larger when the raw numbers are small. Changing definitions of crime and changing attitudes respecting the punishment of young offenders also shape crime statistics. Media accounts rarely provide adequate contextualization for the statistics they present. Generally, youth court rates (including female youth) decreased for both violent and non-violent crime convictions; yet it is not uncommon for media reports to suggest otherwise. These chapters add to the literature by providing context for and a nuanced interpretation of crime and court statistics. By using secondary data, including historical scholarly works, governmental documents and reports, and official crime and court statistics to examine crime and court trends, I was able to explore the impact of changing legislation, ideology,

and societal change on trends. By comparing and contextualizing the statistics, this chapter showed that girls' crime rates continue to be significantly below boys' rates, and any increases over the years studied were miniscule, even when the percentages appeared large.

6.3 Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 compared trends in youth crime (measured as youth court charges and convictions) with trends in media accounts of youth crime, both quantitatively and qualitatively. While previous research has explored media reports of youth crime, specifically focusing on the presence of moral panics and gendered representations (DeKeserdy, 2010; Doob & Sprott, 1998; Faith, 2011; Faucher, 2007; Reitsma-Street, 1999; Sprott & Doob, 2009), research had not previously explored whether trends in news reporting actually reflect crime trends. In chapter 4, the research question that guided this portion of the analysis was as follows: does the quantity of news articles about youth crime or youth violence vary in accordance with youth crime rates? The focus in Chapter 5 was similar, but limited to female youth court trends and news media coverage. In both chapters, I looked for possible statistical correlations between official youth crime and court patterns and the frequency of news reports on youth crime. To do this, a content analysis of Canadian newspapers between 1991 and 2014¹⁴ was conducted.

Unexpectedly, I found support for a positive statistical relationship between official crime and court statistics and the quantities of news stories on youth crime. The correlations between overall and property crime charges and news articles were only marginally statistically significant. The correlation between violent crime charges and news articles

¹⁴ Chapter 5's analysis on female youth crime covered the years 1991 to 2011/12 since court data for 2012-2014 have not been released by Statistics Canada yet. The comparison to news media was limited to the years 1991 and 2011.

was strong and statistically significant. This remained true when examining stories on female youth crime and violent court convictions among female youth. The frequency of news stories on girls' crime did not correlate strongly with overall girls' crime trends. Given the extensive literature on media bias and moral panics, it was expected that news articles would not correlate with real crime trends. However, news accounts of youth crime have generally decreased in the last decade along with youth crime rates. Nonetheless, there were times when news accounts spiked, even when crime rates did not. Follow-up qualitative analysis was conducted to see if these spikes in news coverage represented moral panics.

Previous research has argued that renditions of crime, including youth crime, are representative of youth-based moral panics on crime (Best, 1999; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; Chesney-Lind, 1999, 1999; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004, 2004; Faith, 2011; Jewkes, 2015, 2004, 2011; Krinsky, 2008b; Males, 2010; Sangster, 2002; Welch, Price, & Yankey, 2002a). Research on media representations of female young offenders has similarly argued that they reflect a moral panic not real crime trends (Cohen, 1972, 2002; DeKeserdy, 2010; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994, 2009, 2010; Krinsky, 2008a, 2013; Schissel, 1997, 2008; Smart, 2013; Welch, Price, & Yankey, 2002b). Chesney-Lind (2006) also found evidence of a feminist backlash within news accounts of girls' criminality. In chapters 4 and 5, when examining media representations for evidence of moral panics, I paid particular attention to a few high-profile cases.

Qualitative analysis indicated that journalists heavily overstated the frequency of violence among youth, including female youth. Peaks in news coverage coincided with high profile crime cases involving youth in Canada. Each of the high profile cases fit into Cohen's (1972) typology of a moral panic developed to describe the mods and rockers in 1960s and 1970s British culture: I found evidence of concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. Youth crime was declared a growing social problem. The stories portrayed young people as being out of control, oftentimes due to a modern society that was considered to be devoid of traditional morals and values. In each case, youth crime was portrayed as increasing in both violence and severity despite publically available crime and court statistics that suggested otherwise. Moral panics focused on

crime committed by minority youth in particular, suggesting that minority youth are viewed as a potential threat to the social order, and the lives of the privileged.

News representations of female youth crime supported the notion that crime and violence among girls had reached unprecedented levels and that there was good reason to be alarmed. Girls' involvement with crime was not mentioned often within the overall sample of youth crime in Canada, but when it was, girls were presented as increasingly dangerous and violent. As we have seen, publically available Statistics Canada data provides no evidence that girls' involvement in violent or non-violent crimes has increased substantially. The portrayal of female youth and exaggeration of their crimes pointed to the existence of two female-centered folk devils within Canadian news media: the masculinized and unfeminine woman/girl and the modern girl that appears typically feminine, but manipulates, controls, and harms those around her. On the one hand, girls were seen as adopting masculine traits and behaving like boys. On the other, they were deemed dangerously feminine, appearing feminine and innocent, but prone to hidden violence. The construction of female folk devils, corresponding with traditional gendered tropes, highlights one way that moral panics are tied to gender inequality. By embracing gender essentialism, news accounts may imply that the best way to control girls' behaviour is to reinforce traditional gender norms, and eliminate the forces undermining them.

The female folk devils and moral panic centered on gender provide examples of what Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2010) refer to as institutionalization; this occurs when a moral panic is not volatile, but lingers and is tied with social structures. Like the media renditions from the early to late 1990s of 'girls gone bad', the female-centered moral panics of the past twenty-five years were less about criminality and more about the transgression and violation of femininity. News stories juxtaposed modern girls with a nostalgic past where traditional gendered, raced, and classed norms prevailed. In this case, girls' engagement in non-feminine activities, namely violence and criminality, represents a threat to the operation of patriarchy and thus is met with gendered forms of social control, or what Chesney-Lind (2006) calls the 'feminist backlash.'

Chesney-Lind (2006) suggests that since the civil war, the United States has been experiencing a resurgence and strengthening of conservative politics and traditional norms and values. Through the use of 'tough on crime' crime policies, in addition to the rhetoric expressed by conservative moral entrepreneurs regarding possible threats to traditional norms and values, this movement seeks to limit social rights movements. Specifically, right-wing politics are said to be used to erode the rights of women and people of colour by using criminal justice policies as mechanisms of social control to maintain the status quo (Chesney-Lind, 2006). My research shows that a similar backlash has been occurring in Canada that targets the same populations. However, the backlash exemplified here extends beyond gender, race, and class, but also casts young people as a threat to the social order. Through the creation of folk devils and the criminalizing of those who threaten societal ideals, dominant social powers can stop any dissent, including anyone that seek social justice or challenge societal structures, in its tracks.

The concept of moral panics has been useful in analyzing news representations of youth crime, yet at its core, the concept seems to reflect broader social inequalities. The literature has highlighted gender inequalities, but my research also highlights inequalities around age. The backlash identified in the research, which is constructed along gendered, raced, and classed lines, is also one that includes age as a construct. According to Cohen (2002), youth have consistently occupied a distinct place within the scholarly work on folk devils and moral panics. It has been suggested that this is because of the societal risks associated with youth; youth are deemed to be both a risk to society and at risk in society (Krinsky, 2008a; Thompson, 1998, 2013). It is feared that youth will create social upheaval. According to Schissel (2008), the law itself creates 'bad citizens' out of those who are already on the margins of society and seeks to further silence already muffled voices. Why might dominant groups and powerful people stigmatize and seek to control the behaviours of youth? According to Côté and Allahar (1994): "young people lack power, rights, and legitimacy... however, they are crucial to the economic system because they constitute cheap labor, as well as a massive consumer market;" it is in the best interests of the political and economic systems that youth do not know this (p.109). By keeping young people on the margins and disenfranchised, youth will be unable to

realize their power and exercise it to change the status quo (Cote & Allahar, 1994; Schissel, 2008).

Overall, this research adds to the literature by revealing a positive correlation between crime and court statistics and the quantity of news stories in Canadian national newspapers. Media reports may, then, reflect real-world trends, and are not solely distorting events. At the same time, though, the content of news articles is distorting and shows evidence of moral panics. This study also adds to the feminist criminological literature by showing that numerically news reports may partly reflect crime trends, but that the content of news articles produces two linked female folk devils. The literature has focused on the ‘masculinized’ women in news reports. But women are also seen as dangerously feminine. Small increases in girls’ bullying offences, documented in crime statistics, are often reflected in media accounts, as femininity ‘gone bad.’ Research on girls’ crime should continue to untangle these two different folk devils and explore their implications for societal responses to girls’ crime. In general, chapters 4 and 5 add nuance to the moral panic and media and crime literature. Although there is a connection between media and crimes rates, this connection is distorted by the content of media accounts. Further, news stories do not reflect general crime and court trends, most of which are non-violent, but relate only to violent crime trends.

6.4 Limitations

Although my research contributes to various disciplines in the social sciences, it is not without limitations. My research examined the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) and the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS) to assess trends in criminal offending among youth in Canada. However, it is widely known within criminology that much criminal activity does not come to the attention of criminal justice authorities, nor does it proceed formally through the Canadian courts to be prosecuted. Thus, it is important to be cognizant that while my research uses these types of statistics, it is not possible to ever reach the ‘dark figure of crime’ (Bell, 2015; O’Regan & Reid, 2012). In other words, it is not possible to account for all criminal actions in Canada, and crime and court statistics

only represent a portion of all occurring crime, as opposed to a ‘true’ representation. Similarly, the secondary and historical data used for this dissertation rely on how others have interpreted and evaluated crime trends and the accuracy of these accounts cannot be determined. Moreover, it must be remembered that UCR and ICCS data only count the most serious crimes for each particular criminal incident and if one was charged and convicted of two separate crimes, only the most serious of each would be reflected in each database. As such, some crime is not counted. If the number of offences youth are charged with has increased over time, these national statistics cannot capture such a change.

Similarly, the content analysis of Canadian newspapers between the years 1991 and 2014 may not be entirely reflective of all stories about youth crime. Literature searches in the online databases Lexus Nexus and Factiva were conducted for the National Post, Toronto Star, and Globe and Mail. The same search terms were used in each database, yet each search engine contained some articles the other did not, despite the assumption that both databases should contain the same newspaper archives. The search terms, ‘youth crime,’ ‘youth violence,’ ‘girl crime,’ ‘girl violence,’ ‘boy crime,’ and ‘boy violence’ were included, but different terms may have elicited more stories on youth crime. While ‘Young offenders act,’ and ‘youth criminal justice act’ were included in initial searches, they did not appear to include many additional articles not encapsulated by the original key word searches. In using the search term ‘violence’, my searches may have more accurately captured news articles on violent crime, rather than other crime. It is possible that my searches did not identify all articles published on youth crime, which may have affected the analyses conducted in chapters 4 and 5. Nonetheless, I was as thorough as I could be, and I believe the articles do provide a reasonable reflection of news reporting on youth crime.

Lastly, my research was not able to adopt an intersectional lens, despite original aspirations to do so. Official crime statistics do not take account of class and race or ethnicity. Hence, I could not introduce a consideration of class and race when analyzing statistical trends. Race and class were mentioned in news reports, and I include a small consideration of these issues in chapter 4; however, follow-up analysis is needed to do

justice to intersectionality in media accounts. Moreover, this dissertation focused on youth crime generally and on girls' involvement in crime and did not include an extensive analysis of masculinity within the news stories. Preliminary analyses revealed hidden nuances where boys were rarely explicitly discussed. Rather, 'youth' was often taken to mean 'boy'. It was decided that depictions of boys and masculinity in news accounts was a complex subject, deserving of its own analysis. This issue will be the subject of a future follow-up study. This follow-up study will take an intersectional lens to explore race and class in depictions of masculinity as well.

6.5 Future Research

Each chapter of my dissertation explores the representations of youth crime in Canada from varying sources across time. As noted, its contribution is in bringing together analyses of media reports, crime trends, and legislative developments. Each of these sources of information provides a unique, albeit overlapping, portrayal or construction of youth crime within Canada. It is in bringing these different pieces of information together that we can see the discrepancy between crime trends and media reports, and the impact of legislative change. Future research should continue to explore representations of crime from a variety of perspectives, and by bringing different kinds of evidence together. Further, the analysis here supports claims that crime, crime legislation, and gender are social constructions. Implicit in our definitions of youth, crime, and gender are hegemonic ideologies that are institutionalized in our social structures. Acknowledging this, one must realize that an examination of statistical and media portrayals tells us not only about possible empirical trends, but also about dominant societal definitions of deviance and morality. As a result, researchers must be cognizant of how portrayals of youth and youth crime, whether statistical or within media and popular culture, may be manipulated, misused, or misinterpreted.

One area where crime and court statistics could be misunderstood concerns the few violent crimes among youth that are increasing. More research is needed that explores the crimes of uttering threats and criminal harassment as statistical increases in these areas

are documented in the study. Increases in the crimes of uttering threats and criminal harassment likely have more to do with an increased focus on bullying and changing morality standards in Canada as opposed to a substantive increase in these behaviours among youth (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008; Chesney-Lind et al., 2010; DeKeserdy, 2010; Doob & Sprott, 1998). Statistical data can be a source of confusion, as well as a tool to reinforce popularly held beliefs and stereotypes about youth and gender. Future research should explore trends in these crimes more closely to determine if they represent an ideological shift and change in the definitions of crime and criminality, or a marked change in young people's behaviours. Future research should use crime and court statistics in a way that contextualizes the ideological constructs that are implicit in them.

This study also points to the need for future research that will complement the current findings. This research focused on depictions of girls and youth more generally. An examination of masculinity in portrayals of youth crime remains to be done. According to Kimmel (1993), gender, race and class are often demarcated along lines of privilege with dominant groups being awarded shields of invisibility. This cloak of invisibility is possible due to the power associated with hegemonic masculinity and its embeddedness in existing social structures (Kimmel, 1993). Preliminary analysis of news media reports suggests that Canadian news media granted anonymity to masculinity, whiteness, and the advantaged socio-economic classes by leaving these groups unidentified and under-analyzed; however, more research needs to be done to determine if this is the case. If masculinity is invisible in news accounts, this is problematic because it prevents any dialogue on how dominant constructions of masculinity might account for a significant proportion of crime and violent crime.

Similarly, this research found not only gendered depictions of youth crime in Canada, but also portrayals that were classed and racialized. In the current study, preliminary research indicated that race and class are drawn into media accounts through the use of symbolic imagery reflecting urban centers, downtown cores, and poverty stricken neighbourhoods. A more in-depth intersectional examination of the racialized and classed depictions of youth crime in Canada is needed because when race and poverty are listed as possible reasons for youth crime, the public may believe simplistic stereotypes that certain

populations are just inherently prone to criminality. These types of analyses are especially crucial in a Canadian setting due to the vast overrepresentation of Aboriginal, Black and lower-socioeconomic populations within the criminal justice system (Bell, 2015; E. Comack & Balfour, 2004; E. Comack, 2011; Elizabeth Comack, Schissel, Brooks, & Doughty, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2013). An intersectional analysis of gender, race, class, and age can also help feminists to deconstruct how criminalized girls and youth have been portrayed within the media by showing the ways they are used to invoke moral panics.

6.6 Conclusion

This research contributes to the fields of sociology and feminist criminology by exploring the social construction of youth, crime, and gender while at the same time deconstructing depictions of female-centered and youth-based folk devils. Researchers and media representatives should continue to use a critical lens when viewing crime and court statistics since they are products of the social construction of gender, youth, and crime. As ideologies shift, so too does the construction of what constitutes a crime and who is portrayed as a criminal. Additionally, research should explore the ways crimes are possibly policed differently according to gender, race and class. Differing treatment of those in poverty, youth of colour, and female youth have serious implications not only for those directly affected, as highlighted by the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement, but also for the interpretation of statistics that may reinforce dominant assumptions about the classes, genders, and races. Research that analyzes, highlights and deconstructs the social construction of gender, crime, and violence can greatly improve research on youth crime as my analysis clearly shows that the representation of youth is shaped by dominant ideologies. Chesney-Lind (2006) believes that one of the main goals of feminist criminology should be to continually and consciously challenge and address backlash media narratives in order to combat the negative images of girls and criminality. In my research, I aim to counter the distortions in the negative and violent representations and depictions of young people and girls in trouble with the law. The examination of youth crime and court trends, in addition to studying the social construction of youth and crime,

highlights how ideology can influence both statistical and media trends. News media and conceptions of crime and criminality reflect societal values and reinforce hegemonic norms; however, studies like this one help to provide a competing representation.

6.7 References

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