

The Criminal ‘Edgework’ Alternative Hypothesis: Is the Advancement of Entertainment and Communications Media Reducing Crime?

By Simon Hayward¹

Abstract

In an unexpected turn, the Western world is experiencing a steady reduction in crime, which began in the mid – 1990’s. In an attempt to make sense of this 15 year crime drop, Criminologists have been proposing many different explanations, all of which suffer from a lack of evidence to provide validity and reliability.

The idea is that this 15 year crime drop is partly due to the unintended consequences of some form of relatively new human activity or invention. The proposition put forward within this dissertation is whether the advancement in entertainment and communications media has played a part in this crime recession. The argument is that this advancement in media technology has provided a substitute and a distraction from committing real life crime. The new emerging trend in Criminology has been to cite Routine Activities Theory as an explanation for the crime drop, and given that the advancement in entertainment and communications media has been an obvious change in society, the theory has been incorporated into this study. The notion of ‘edgework’ is also a focus, as it is an original and interesting concept that humans craving for the exhilaration of risk can cause crime, and that modern day media technologies may provide an alterative avenue to feed this craving. We may call this hypothesis: The ‘Edgework’ Alternative Hypothesis.

Ultimately, however, it is clear that the study suffers from the same lack of evidence and support that other explanations suffer, and that further research is needed in order to validate the research. At present, the research is very much down to individual opinion.

¹ This Dissertation is submitted in part-fulfilment of the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Criminology, Nottingham Trent University, Division of Criminology, Public Health and Policy Studies

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my dissertation supervision, Mike Sutton for his help and input through the process. I would also like to thank the rest of the Nottingham Trent University Criminology department for a great experience that I will treasure.

I would also like to thank my friends and family who have given me constant support throughout the dissertation, as without them I would not have been able to focus myself to achieve the best that I can achieve. I would like to say a special thanks to my parents because if it wasn't for the sacrifices they have made, I would never have got to this position and I will be forever grateful for that. I would also like to thank my girlfriend Kim who is always there when I need support.

Thanks to everybody involved who helped me along the way. It has been a memorable experience that I will take with me for life.

Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to examine whether the fifteen – year general crime drop in the UK and USA can be attributed to the advancement of entertainment and communications media acting as a suitable substitute and distraction for crime and delinquency. The study will analyse the notion of ‘edgework’ and whether the above types of technological media reduce the need to take part in criminal activity. ‘Edgework’ can be described as voluntary activities that involve a level of personal risk, for the purpose gaining sensual or emotional rewards from the experience itself (Lyng, 2004).

‘Over the past 30 years, crime has become a major issue of public concern, of political discussion and action... and of major public expenditure’ (Blumenstein & Rosenfeld, 2008: 13). In order to develop a reliable and adaptable plan that aims to tackle the many issues within crime, it is important to gain a clear understanding of the factors that shape crime trends. However, despite the level of public concern, there is a very limited knowledge base about the factors that shape crime trends (Blumstein & Rosenfeld, 2008), and at present, nations lack a comprehensive, coherent, and up – to – date infrastructure allowing them to understand and monitor crime trends (Rosenfeld & Goldberger, 2008). Developing an infrastructure and knowledge base is important because the reformation plans of government policies, and the decisions of where to focus public expenditure have to be made well in advance of implementation (Blumstein & Rosenfeld, 2008). This research is an attempt to further our knowledge, by focussing on one of the newer possible factors shaping crime trends, in order to understand how to successfully reduce as much crime as possible.

There have been many different explanations put forward to account for the fifteen – year crime drop. The four main factors being ‘increased number of police, the prison population, the decline of crack markets and legalised abortion... however, these explanations do not appear to have external validity’ (Farrell et al, 2010: 26). This meaning the crime drop in other countries does not correlate with these factors. For example, USA sentencing procedures are far less punitive than that of countries within the EU, yet crime rates are falling at a similar pace all round (Farrell et al, 2010). Also, the hypotheses that have been put forward to date are partly tested, largely untested, or have not been adequately explored (Farrell et al, 2010). Therefore, arguably, a widely accepted explanation of the general crime drop does not currently exist. Nonetheless, most of them are still possible, plausible explanations that have been studied in great depth. However, there is a distinct gap in literature on the relationship between the notion of ‘edgework’, and the advancement in entertainment and communications media, and whether this modern day media can in fact reduce incidences of criminal ‘edgework’.

Chapter 2 focuses on the methodology that was used for this particular study. In this case, secondary research was the method chosen, and the advantages and disadvantages of this type of research method were explored. The reasons in which primary research was not undergone in this study were explored, including the consideration of possible ethical issues that may have arose. The chapter also outlines the types of secondary sources used, and explores the various positives and negatives of each one.

Chapter 3 introduces the reader to the concept of ‘edgework’. It will describe what exactly this concept is about, and will explain what constitutes an ‘edgework’ activity, giving a whole host of different examples, including crime and how it is closely related with the ‘edgework’ experience. The different sensations that can be felt during an activity of this sort

will be explored, including excitement, self – determination and a feeling of rebellion from social norms. The chapter will also introduce the main hypothesis of the study, and will explain the way in which routine activities theory can relate.

Chapter 4 focuses on the level of access and usage of entertainment and communications media in contemporary society. It will explain the growth and development of modern day media, presenting statistics showing the amount of media usage compared to a few years back. Also, it will explain whether the working class have the necessary funds to access this media, which is an important point. Lastly, it will explain how the increased use of entertainment and communications media may mean there is less time for crime, presenting routine activities theory within the argument.

Chapter 5 introduces the relationship between entertainment and communications media, boredom and the fifteen – year crime drop in the Western world. It will focus on how boredom can be blamed for criminal ‘edgework’, and how modern day media technology can be used to help the situation. The rationale for government and local authority schemes, why delinquent ‘edgework’ still takes place regardless, and the argument for how media in contemporary society can be of aid will be addressed. Finally, the chapter will look at boredom as a cause of alcohol and drug abuse, and how media can reduce this.

Chapter 6 focuses on the impact that modern day violent media has on violent criminal ‘edgework’. It first presents a background stating the high level of exposure people have to violence in the media, and then presents and analyses the two opposing arguments of whether violent media increases violent criminal ‘edgework’, or whether it reduces it.

The final chapter provides a summary of all the information presented within the presentation. It provides an evaluation of each chapter individually, and then presents an overall conclusion to the topic in question. Lastly, it suggests ways in which the research can become more valid.

Chapter 2: Methodology

For the purpose of this dissertation, a secondary research approach was adopted. For Neuman (2003: 321) secondary research ‘is the reanalysis of previously collected survey or other data that were originally gathered by others’. This new analysis of data is collected for a different purpose than what was originally intended (Baker, 1988). Types of secondary sources include newspaper reports, research articles, websites, academic books and academic journals; all of which will be utilised in this dissertation.

There are a number of benefits that come with the secondary analysis of published literature. Secondary analysis offers the prospect of having access to good quality literature for a small fraction of the resources involved in carrying out a study yourself (Bryman, 2008). Frankfort - Nachmias and Nachmias (2008: 278) stated that ‘it is infinitely less expensive to use existing data than to collect new data’. This is especially beneficial for students as they have very little amounts of time and money available to them. Also, much of the literature that is employed most frequently for secondary analysis is of extremely high quality (Bryman,

2008). This is due to wide varieties of regions covered, rigorous sampling procedures and highly experienced researchers (Bryman, 2008).

Another benefit of secondary research is that it can be used as a means of comparison (Frankfort – Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008), which increases the validity of research findings. By comparing existing publications, unbiased and trustworthy arguments can be made about each of the dissertations objectives, such as whether or not modern day entertainment and communications media serves as an effective way of counter – acting boredom.

A primary research approach was considered, however the aims and objectives of this particular dissertation could be achieved by the analysis of past research. Also, to gain reliable primary research data on the levels of access and usage of entertainment and communications media in modern day society would require survey and questionnaire results from a vast array of individuals from all types of background. For an undergraduate dissertation, time constraints mean that such a task is not productive. Also, there are a number of ethical issues that arise when considering primary research for this topic. For example, conducting primary research into the effect that violent media has on individuals may prove to be a sensitive topic due to its personalised and potentially upsetting nature. Although confidentiality and anonymity would be taken into account, participants may not be willing to answer personal questions truthfully and may also answer in a way that they feel the researcher would want. This would significantly hinder the research and considering these issues would become far too complex and time consuming.

Although there are many positive aspects to secondary research, there are also a number of negatives. When doing secondary research there ‘may be problems with the availability, format and quality’ (Kumar, 2005: 141) of literature. Although comparing existing publications can increase the validity of research findings, it can be difficult to determine the quality and reliability of certain sources. Web - based sources in particular need to be utilised with a level of caution as ‘it can be very difficult to differentiate what is useful and reliable from that which is too simplistic... or just not sufficiently academic’ (Bryman, 2008: 98). Information published on web-based sources may not be reviewed or regulated. However, if used and filtered correctly, web – based sources can be a quick and easy way of gaining relevant information.

A similar problem occurs in the case of newspaper reports, magazines or ‘official’ body sources such as those written by the Home Office. The problem here is that the writer’s of these sources are less likely to express rigorousness and objectivity than writers of research reports, leading to a problem with personal bias (Kumar, 2005). These sources are often used to express personal or organisational views on a subject, rather than basing them on solid evidence. There is also a reliability problem with Government bodies ‘official’ statistics, as they do not cater for ‘dark figures’, or in other words, data that hasn’t been recorded. Therefore, ‘official’ statistics should not be taken on face value, as they are open to interpretation. This is a concern when considering figures on the fifteen-year crime drop, and the usage and availability of entertainment and communications media, as the ‘dark figure’ needs to be taken into account.

Another problem with secondary analysis is that original literature may not be readily available, as original researchers are not after all, required to make their raw data available to others (Frankfort – Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). This becomes a problem when it comes to

online journals. They are useful in providing an up to date analysis of a topic; however, they are not always possible to access without significant charge. Books are more readily available from libraries and provide a broader analysis of a topic, however, they are often out of date. This is a concern especially when considering research on crime, as the topic is constantly changing and evolving.

Chapter 3: ‘Edgework’ and the Routine Activities Theory

3.1. What is ‘edgework’?

‘Edgework’ is a term originating with the famous journalist Hunter S Thompson. He used the term to describe the many anarchic experiences that humans may go through, the most famous being his period of drugs experimentation (Lyng, 1990). These anarchic human experiences describe a variety of voluntary activities that provide the individual with a sense of control and self – determination (Lyng, 2005) though the adrenaline fuelled nature of ‘negotiating the boundary between life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, and sanity and insanity’ (Lyng, 1990: 855). In other words, ‘edgework’ is the negotiation of two extreme and opposing boundaries (McGovern & McGovern, 2011). It is the study into ‘the way in which individuals engaging in acts of extreme risk – taking... push themselves to the edge of danger in search of both excitement and certainty’ (Maguire et al, 2007: 112 – 113). In a philosophical sense, it can be said that for one to achieve a level of control, they must first lose control (Maguire et al, 2007). In other words, ‘edgework’ involves pursuing voluntary and substantial personal risk in order to fulfil ones need for an ordered existence through excitement and thrills.

One thing that all ‘edgework’ activities have in common is that they ‘all involve a clearly observable threat to one’s physical or mental wellbeing or one’s sense of an ordered existence’ (Lyng, 1990: 857). Some of these activities include dangerous sports such as motor racing, skydiving, bobsledding, or hanggliding; dangerous occupations such as combat soldiering, policing, firefighting, or commercial fishing; and criminal activity, such as muggings, gang fighting, vandalism and drug use. Crime can be described as a form of ‘edgework’ activity as it blurs the boundaries between order and disorder, and involves voluntary and substantial personal risk to ones wellbeing.

Stephan Lyng first applied the concept of ‘edgework’ to a social scientific setting in 1990, after a lengthy five year ethnographic study by Lyng and Snow in 1986, into the complex and risky subculture of skydiving. He compiled rich data using a number of techniques such as ‘participant observation, semi - structured interviews, and document analysis’ (Lyng, 1990: 855). He called the concept, the ‘edgework’ model of voluntary risk taking, and used it to highlight the shortcomings of a number of previous voluntary risk models, such as “‘the personality predisposition” model and the “intrinsic motivation” model’ (Lyng, 1990: 853). ‘Edgework’ addresses a problem that most sociologists of risk fail to mention – that being the understanding of what motivates people to engage in such risky and dangerous activities (Lyng, 2005), and attempts to explain these activities using a social psychological perspective from Marx and Mead (McGovern & McGovern, 2011). This perspective explains how individuals develop their ‘edgework’ skills in order to gain an intense sensual experience, and also to feel in control of their own life and environment in a modern society that promotes alienation and oversocialization (McGovern & McGovern, 2011).

2.2. The Seductive Nature of Crime

It may be argued that to take significant personal risks in order to achieve a high level of thrill and satisfaction, is in fact human nature. As we have established, there are many legal opportunities to take part in recreational 'edgework', such as sky – diving or motor racing. However, for those that do not possess the necessary amounts of money to undergo these activities, then crime can be a suitable alternative, and an appealing prospect.

For the many individuals who undergo criminal 'edgework', the seductive nature of crime may derive from a number of different angles. It may be suggested that the seductive nature of criminal 'edgework' stems from the particular emotions and sensations generated by the high – risk nature of these activities. Jack Katz was the first to direct attention in the field of cultural criminology, to the 'aesthetic and emotional attractions of the criminal experience' (Lyng, 2004: 361), in his book *The Seductions of Crime* in 1988. 'Katz claim is that criminals seek not material rewards but the sensual experience of the crime itself' (Frank, 1989). Furthermore, Ferrell (1999) suggested that participation and membership in deviant and criminal subcultures is shaped by the 'edgework' experience, so the emotional experience of crime and the 'edgework' experience can therefore be linked together as 'two closely related accounts of transcendental experiences that can be located along one common continuum' (Lyng, 2004: 361 – 362).

To fully explain the feelings that 'edgework' produces is a complicated task. Some 'edgeworkers' even believe that attempts to capture these feelings within language should not be attempted, describing the 'edgework' experience as ineffable (Lyng, 1990). Obviously not all types of 'edgework' produce precisely the same sensation, however, Lyng (1990: 860) states that 'participants in virtually all types of edgework claim that the experience produces a sense of "self – realization," "self – actualization," or "self – determination"'. This is due to the fact that in moments of danger, or moments on the edge, an individual is forced 'to deal with the immediacy of the moment by responding 'instinctively' to the evolving circumstances' (Lyng, 2004). In other words, the actor is forced to revert to actions that come to them instinctively, as there is no time to formulate effective plans in order to tackle the problems at hand. Therefore, only in moments of danger does ones true self, and true potential appear. The 'edgework' sensations also typically involve a sense of fear in the anticipatory phase of the activity; which then gives way to feelings of exhilaration and omnipotence in the action phase (Lyng, 1990). Omnipotence in this context means the belief that they are able to deal with any threatening situation successfully. These feelings prove to be seductive to many, as they produce a sense of power and control.

It is suggested also, that Criminal 'edgework' provides an escape from the reality of the more socially controlled and routinized nature of modern - day society. The Marx and Mead synthesis refers to the effects that the divisions and separations of post – industrial society cause (McGovern & McGovern, 2011). It suggests that 'structural conditions [of modern day society] and their effects, which are often seen as out of the control social actors, give rise to 'alienation' (Marx 1974) and 'oversocialization' (Mead 1934)' (McGovern & McGovern, 2011: 488). This alienation and oversocialization of contemporary society gives rise to deviant and criminal subcultures, whose deviant responses are due to these collectively experienced societal problems (Ferrell et al, 2008). These deviant subcultures give individuals a way to rebel from social norms and take back control of their owns lives, for within the threat of the 'edgework' experience, 'lies an opportunity to control the

‘uncontrollable’ and create meaning within an otherwise meaningless existence’ (McGovern & McGovern, 2011: 488).

3.3. Routine Activities Theory and the Crime Drop Hypothesis

Routine activities theory suggests that crime is committed due to three variables. These are the absence of capable guardians, the presence of motivated offenders and the availability of suitable targets (Siegel, 2011). Routine activities theory can also be explained as a ‘theory of how crime changes in response to larger shifts in society. The key to such change is the technology of everyday life, which organizes where we are, what we do, and what happens to us. That technology governs how crime carves its niche into everyday life’ (Felson & Boba, 2010 cited in Sutton, 2010). In other words, technology influences the way in which crime affects our lives, as technology is what controls and runs our everyday routines. So it is safe to say that as technology changes and advances over the years, then criminal ‘edgework’ will also change in some way. Therefore it can be suggested that the fifteen year crime drop that the UK and USA has been experiencing is a result of the massive changes in both the amount, and the advancement, of entertainment and communications technology available today.

It has long been assumed that the communications revolution would bring about negative consequences for society. For example, violent television programmes and computer games allegedly desensitize young people to crimes such as car theft, violence and sex crimes, contributing to an increase in these crimes committed in real life (Sutton et al, 2012). Also, social networking media such as Facebook has been associated with an increase in cyber - bullying (Sutton et al, 2012). However, ‘beyond anecdotal examples, none of these allegations are supported by research’ (Sutton et al, 2012: 5).

It can be argued that as society became more socially controlled and routinized, the need and opportunity to undergo ‘edgework’ risks in the form of crime and rebellion increased. This naturally led to an increase in crime over the years. A hypothesis can be put forward suggesting that:

Crime drops, such as the fifteen year crime drop, happen when crime substituting activities, such as entertainment and communications media, advance. In such situations people are given alternative, legal and affordable ways in which to fulfil their natural ‘edgework’ needs. This serves as both a substitute and a distraction from taking part in criminal ‘edgework’. We might call this potential explanation: The Criminal ‘Edgework’ Alternative Hypothesis.

Modern day entertainment and communications media such as playing violent video games and watching violent movies can be argued as being able to provide the same self – determining and exhilarating ‘edgework’ experience as crime, without having to leave the house.

There have been many explanations put forward to explain variations in crime rates over the years, including a number of explanations for the decrease in crime rates over the last fifteen years. A number of partially tested hypotheses for the crime drop include larger prison populations and longer sentences, and the development of more effective and innovative police strategies such as ‘zero tolerance’ policing (Farrell et al, 2010). However, in reality there is no significant evidence to suggest that a particular explanation is much more substantially correct than any of the others, ‘as most of these hypotheses do not provide

adequate explanations of the crime drop' (Farrell et al, 2010: 27). They all offer possible, plausible explanations that have been studied in great depth, but suffer from inadequacy due to validity problems such as a lack of evidence or support (Farrell et al, 2010) However, using routine activities theory to explain the crime drop has been a new emerging trend in criminology, and is described 'as probably the most compelling theory of crime trends' (Farrell et al, 2010: 31). Felson suggested routine activities theory based explanations in 1998, but other than that, the theory seems to have been largely overlooked until now (Farrell et al, 2010). Therefore, the application of routine activities theory to the relationship between modern day media advancements, and the concept of 'edgework', may be a good direction to take future analysis and literature on the variations of crime rates.

Chapter 4: Access and Usage of Entertainment and Communications Media in Contemporary Society

4.1. The Development of the Use of Modern Day Entertainment and Communication Media

In order to evaluate the effects that entertainment and communications media has on the 15-year crime drop, it must first be established that more people use these types of media than ever before. It is safe to say that without looking at any statistics, you can argue that the usage must have increased, as there are many more items invented nowadays than in the past. Nonetheless, it must be proved that usage has increased.

In the modern day, we have access to a vast network of entertainment and communications technologies to keep us occupied and make our lives easier, all because of the effects of the communications revolution. 'The "Information Age" of the early 21st century has a long and fascinating history that takes us well back into the 19th century' (Ensmenger, 2006). Arguably the communications revolution began with the invention of the electric telegraph system by Samuel Morse (Ensmenger, 2006), which was quickly adopted by railroads, businessmen, bankers, brokers and many more, because of the advantage of instant communication.

The invention of the telegraph was followed by the invention of the telephone, radio and television (Sutton et al, 2012) in the late 19th century and early 20th century. However, the communications revolution really started to grow exponentially when the National Science Foundation lifted any restrictions on commercial use of the World Wide Web in 1991 (Computer Science Museum, 2006), making it accessible to all the general public. In 1992 the number of computers connected to the Internet passed 1,000,000 (Computer Science Museum, 2006), and by August 2010, the number of devices connected to the Internet increased to 5 billion (Cox, 2010), highlighting the scale of technology growth. The graph below highlights the difference in the amount of Internet users in 2000 compared with that of 2010, with 2010 having a significantly higher figure:

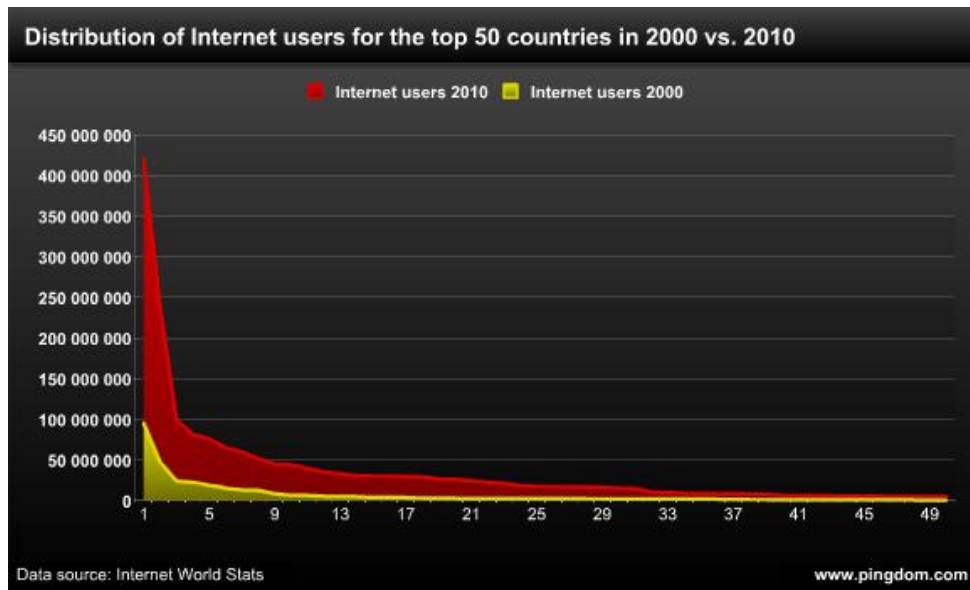


Figure 1. Distribution of Internet users for the top 50 countries in 2000 vs. 2010. Available at: <http://royal.pingdom.com/2010/10/22/incredible-growth-of-the-internet-since-2000/>.

At the same time, cell phone popularity was growing as they became more high – tech and efficient. By 1991, the number of cell phone subscribers hit 120 million (Brick, 2012), and by 2010 the number hit 5 billion (Physorg, 2010). The implementation of affordable smartphones such as the first Apple iPhone in 2007 boosted the industry further as 1,000,000 were sold in the first 74 days (Moritz, 2008). In contrast, 3 million iPhone 3G’s were sold in 2008 within the first month (Moritz, 2008), highlighting the increasing demand for high – tech gadgets. The implementation of smartphones such as the iPhone allowed easy and portable access to a number of different applications such as the Internet, email, Facebook, games and so on, on one handheld device. It is now known that 27% of adults and 47% of teenagers in the UK own a smartphone (Ofcom, 2012). This would naturally increase a person’s average time spent using entertainment and communications technologies.

Social networking media has also increased exponentially over the last decade. It was reported that ‘the number of Facebook accounts held in the UK has reached 30 million, around half the population of the country’ (Daily Mail, 2011). Worldwide, Facebook now has more than 500 million active users, meaning those who have logged onto the site within the last month (Daily Mail, 2011). These figures can be compared with that of 2009, where Facebook surpassed 200 million active users (McCarthy, 2009), working out to around a 250% increase in just a few years. In any given month, there is a total of 700 billion minutes spent online, which is the equivalent of 1.2 millions years (Daily Mail, 2011). The image below shows the average minutes per visitor in January for each social – media site:

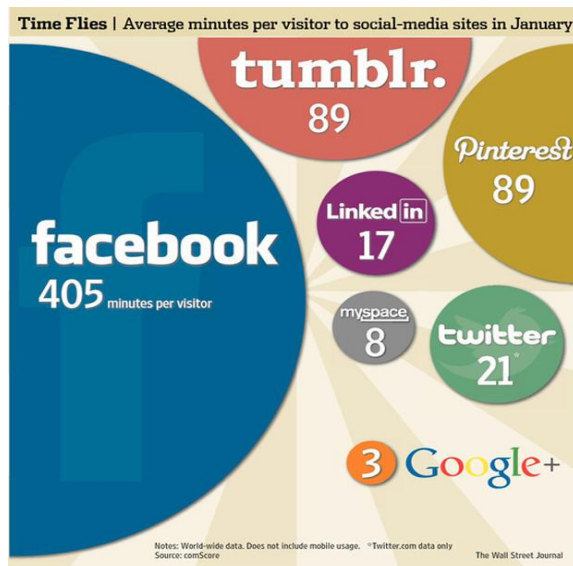


Figure 2. Average minutes per visitor to social – media sites in January. Available at: <http://www.frankwbaker.com/mediause.htm>.

The use and purchasing of computer games and games consoles has also risen over the years as the level of sophistication increased. It is reported that ‘135 million people in the U.S. now play video games for at least one hour each month, compared with 56 million players in 2008’ (Media Literacy Clearing House, 2011). It is claimed that nowadays, 54% of American homes own a games console, and 41% own a current generation console (Media Literacy Clearing House, 2011).

Also, it is a fact that by 2010 114.9 million Americans owned at least one TV in their homes (Nielson, 2010). With the increasing numbers of channels made available by cable companies such as Virgin and Sky, people nowadays have a large variety of favourite TV programmes. This means that more TV’s per household are preferred in order for each house member to be able to watch each of their own favourite TV shows. As of 2010, 28.3% of Americans have 2 TV’s in their home, 25.1% have 3 TV’s, and 29.9% have 4 or more TV’s (Nielson, 2010). The chart below shows how usage of these TVs for men and women has increased by about an hour each between 1988 and 2008:

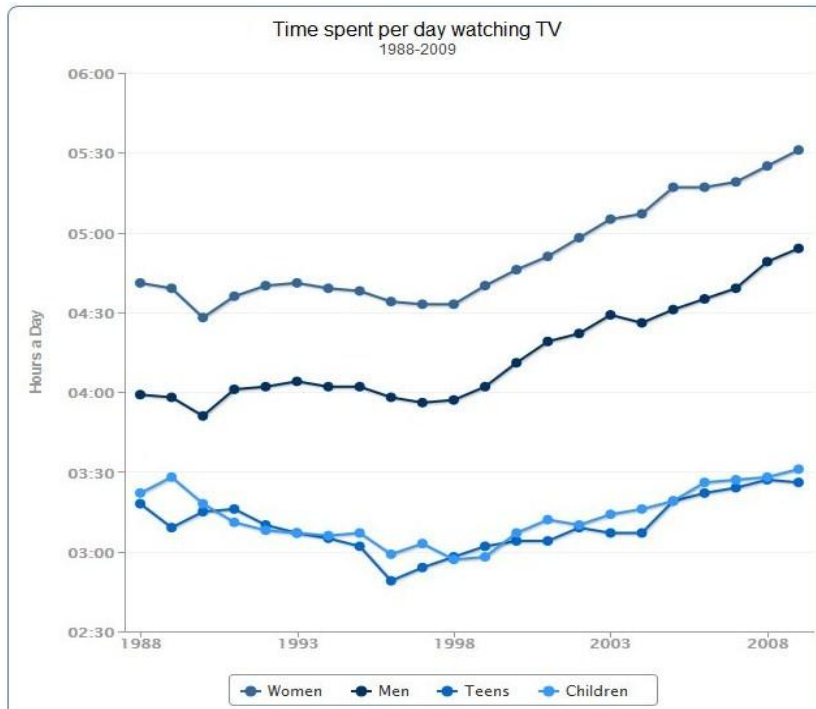


Figure 3. Time spent per day watching TV from 1988 to 2008. Available at: <http://www.frankwbaker.com/mediause.htm>.

The table below shows just how prominent and widespread entertainment and communications media has become:

Daily Media Consumption of Typical Teenager in the USA 2008-2009			
TV 3 hours and 20 minutes	PC 52 minutes	Mobile voice 6 minutes	Audio-only MP3 Player 1 in 2 used
DVD 17 minutes	Internet 23 minutes	Mobile-text messaging 96 sent or received	Video on an MP3 player 1 in 4 watched
DVR 8 minutes	Console gaming 25 minutes	Mobile video If they watched, did so for 13 minutes	Movie theatre Went once in past 5 weeks
Online video. If they watched, watched for 6 minutes	PC games 1 in 10 played	Mobile web 1 in 3 used	Newspaper 1 in 4 read

Adapted from the Nielsen Media Company (2009)

Figure 4. Daily media consumption of a typical teenager in the USA between 2008 and 2009. Available at: <http://www.frankwbaker.com/mediause.htm>.

4.2 The Availability of Modern Day Entertainment and Communications Media to the Working Class

In order to evaluate the effects that entertainment and communications media has on the 15 – year crime drop, it must also be established whether or not people of a working class background actually have access to these modern day media technologies.

It is known that the working class take part in more criminal and deviant ‘edgework’ than the middle and upper classes, and this can be argued to be as a result of their lack of access to legitimate ‘edgework’ activities such as motor racing or sky diving, due to a lack of necessary funds. If they do not have the necessary funds to access these legitimate activities in order to fulfil their ‘edgework’ needs, then they may not have the necessary funds to access modern day entertainment and communications media such as games consoles, cable television, or smartphones to substitute and distract them from criminal ‘edgework’.

As the working class take part in the most criminal and deviant ‘edgework’, if they do not have access to these modern day media technologies, then the 15 – year crime drop will most likely have nothing to do with advancements in technology, and the ‘information age’ of the early 21st century. They would not be affected by the changes in society, and their criminal habits would remain the same.

To gain specific statistics on the amount of media consumption of the working class, compared with that of the middle and upper classes has proven difficult, and statistics like this may not be available. However, it can still be established that the working class do have reasonable access. ‘According to a survey of social attitudes, 57% of adults in the UK claim to be working class’ (BBC News, 2007). If you compare that with the fact that half of the UK’s population has a Facebook account, and how 27% of adults and 47% of teenagers own a smartphone, then it is safe to say that the working class does have reasonable access. Also, the way in which average figures for media consumption have grown also suggests they have access, as the figures would not be growing if such a prominent class in society does not have access. Furthermore, Livingstone (1999: 5) found that ‘both middle – class and working – class children mostly use the PC at home for games’. This statement may suggest that the working class do in fact have access to modern day entertainment and communications media. However, further research would be needed in order to provide solid evidence and validation for this theory.

4.3 Less Time for Crime

You only have to look at the number of sales of modern day entertainment and communications media to realise the extent to which technology has become a part of our lives (Sutton, 2012). There are many more different kinds of digital media available to us than ever before, which is leading to a widespread attachment to modern technologies. There are the sales of smartphones, X – boxes and PlayStation 3’s, iPods, laptops and PC’s, handheld gaming consoles, cable and satellite TV, broadband, music downloads, DVD players, electronic book readers, and the list can go on (Sutton, 2012). Console games, including online gaming has become a massive part of our lives, with Call of Duty Modern Warfare 3 reaching 1 billion dollars in sales in a record 16 days (Stuart & Sweney, 2011). The relevant games consoles paint the same picture, with the Xbox 360 now reaching more

than 66 million units sold worldwide (Takahashi, 2012), and the PlayStation 3 reaching more than 50 million units sold (Whitworth, 2011).

The volume of technology available to us to use takes up significant portions of our life, and has become hugely prominent in modern day society. Sutton (2012) states that ‘an increase in regular and prolonged use of digital technologies takes up time that... might otherwise have been spent on the street...as potential offenders, and also as a potential victim’. In other words, offenders would have less time to offend, and victims would have less time to be victims due to an increase in the time spent using these modern day technologies inside their homes. These media technologies can act as both a substitute and a distraction from committing real life criminal ‘edgework’. These media technologies, especially those such as online video games, can be addictive when taken to excess (Griffiths & Meredith, 2009). People can become addicted in the same way they do to crime, or any other ‘edgework’ activity; that is for the thrill, satisfaction and self – determination of the experience.

As established previously, routine activities theory suggested that crime is committed due to the absence of capable guardians, the presence of motivated offenders, and the availability of suitable targets (Siegel, 2011). Using this theory, reducing the time available for offending, and keeping potential victims and offenders inside will possibly provide the presence of a capable guardian, especially in the case of children and teenagers; will reduce the presence and motivation of offenders, and will reduce the availability and suitability of targets. It can be argued that this would naturally reduce crime rates.

It may be suggested, however, that the 15 – year crime drop in the offline world may in fact be facilitating and transferring to the online world in the form of fraud, harassment, drugs trafficking, copyright theft, hacking etc. As routine activities theory would explain, the changes in society over the years, in regards to advancements in technology, can be argued to have created opportunities for crime elsewhere, such as on the internet (Sutton, 2010). A main example would be fraud, which costs the UK economy £38 billion a year (BBC News, 2011). This is an important issue that would benefit from further research and exploration.

Chapter 5 – The Relationship Between Entertainment and Communications Media, Boredom and the Crime Drop

5.1. Boredom as an Explanation of Crime Trends

A uniform view of the exact definition of boredom does not exist, and it can be interpreted in different ways depending on the individual. Boredom can be defined as the ‘state of being weary and restless through lack of interest’ (Merriam – Webster, 2002 cited in Corvinelli, 2007: 3). Perhaps more suitable to this particular study would be the definition by Zuckerman (1979) cited in Corvinelli (2007: 3) who suggests that boredom is ‘an innate component of sensation or novelty –seeking’. Boredom can be conceived as either a drive state, or a trait which is far from uniform, and the four factors that characterise boredom are stated as arousal, subjective repetition, unpleasantness and constraint (Corvinelli, 2007).

Activists from groups such as Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets are responsible for organising large gathering aimed at taking back the streets from automatic traffic in order to

reinstate natural, face to face community cohesion and engagement (Ferrell, 2004). Activists in these groups, and other related groups, believe ‘that the automobile, while a deadly problem in itself, was in reality symptomatic of a larger set of contemporary problems regarding the mass extermination of human spontaneity, [and] the routinisation of everyday existence’ (Ferrell, 2004: 1). In other words, the automobile is an example of a modern society facilitating repetition and undermining creativity, and in the case of routine activities theory, these changes in society over the years brought with them an increase in criminal and delinquent ‘edgework’ blamed on the effects of boredom. After all, according to Arthur Miller, gang culture is partly blamed on the feelings of boredom. Arthur Miller wrote an essay named ‘Down the Corridor’, which was first printed in 1962 and contains a great account of gang culture in the late 1950’s (Lott, 2002). He suggested that they are all drowning in their one shared feeling – boredom, and therefore makes this the culprit (Lott, 2002). In the case of a delinquent, he suggests that ‘he goes on a raid and feels the thrill of risking his skin or his life’ (Lott, 2002), so that he may escape the boredom of each day.

‘Edgework’, including criminal ‘edgework’ can be categorised as ways to counteract the feelings of boredom, and this is due to the fact that the adrenaline rush of these risky activities and situations, provide ‘vivid experiential and emotional resistance to rationalized control’ (Ferrell, 2004: 5). This meaning that it provides a resistance to societal control and the routinisation of everyday life through experience and emotion. The nature of criminal or deviant activities committed by groups or individuals resemble activities which are not boring, ‘and not boring precisely because they recapture, if momentarily, the lost immediacy of self – made human experience’ (Ferrell, 2004: 6), and provide the self – determination and self – realisation that is lost in contemporary society.

The problem of boredom as being a cause of illegal activity or ‘edgework’ lies more so with the adolescent generation. ‘For the teenager, particularly the poor teenager, boredom is the overwhelming, suffocating, central fact of life’ (Lott, 2002). It is suggested that this is so because they are denied many of the activities, roles and responsibilities that adults undertake, leaving them with large amounts of time on their hands, and nothing to do to fill it (Warr, 2002). Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) cited in Warr (2002: 82) stated that ‘boredom is endemic to adolescents because there is much in their life that they do not control’. Criminal ‘edgework’ gives them something in their lives in which they have control over. However, as the adolescents grow into adults, it can be argued that their illegal activities can increase in seriousness and risk in order to achieve the same level of excitement and same resistance to boredom. This is especially referring to adults who don’t possess the necessary funds to engage in legitimate ‘edgework’ activities and see criminal ‘edgework’ as a worthwhile alternative, as in the case of the utility risk paradigm, the rewards, including resistance to boredom, outweigh the potential negatives.

Risky and creative ‘edgework’ activities have been a part of life for many years and in many different cultures. An example of an ‘edgework’ activity from an entirely different culture is tribal stick fighting in tribes such as the Suri in South – Western Ethiopia (BBC, 2008). This proves that this type of activity is human nature, and to take away the access to this sort of freedom of creativity will only cause crime blamed on boredom. In tribes like these it is often the case that the word boredom does not feature in their terminology, which was found in the case of the Warlpiri people in aboriginal Australia, and when they do refer to boredom, they use the English word for it (Musharbash, 2007). This may suggest that ‘boredom in precontact Warlpiri life was experienced less than it is today, if at all’ (Musharbash, 2007: 310). This may show that the Western world increases and spreads the feelings of boredom

more and more as time goes on, by undermining spontaneity, and leading to an increase in criminal 'edgework' as a result.

The idea is that as the entertainment and communications media advanced unprecedentedly over the last fifteen years, it gave life back some of its spontaneity and served as an effective way of counteracting boredom, and therefore served as a way of reducing criminal 'edgework'. The use of these media advancements is also good for interrupting routine and repetition, providing a pleasant novelty experience, and for breaking away from the constraint of modern day society. All the above factors are said to be solutions to the effects of boredom, so if delinquent or criminal 'edgework' is a result of boredom, then it makes sense to believe that these types of media will reduce the need to commit criminal or deviant acts. Bates and Ferri (2010: 7) state that at the core of entertainment lies, 'exhilaration; fear and relief; sadness or melancholy; sensory delight; and achievement, as in winning a video game'. These feelings of exhilaration and the negotiation of two boundaries are all part of the 'edgework' experience. They help to break away from the routinisation of modern day society, and therefore aid in reducing boredom.

5.2. Government and Local Authority Schemes

There are many different schemes ran by the government, police and local authorities, which are directed towards the teenage, or adolescent group in society. These schemes can be a combination of summer schemes and permanent schemes. Sports clubs are a common component, and may include football teams and schools, boxing, canoeing, swimming, martial arts, abseiling and more (Adamson, 2004). Music and performing arts schools and centres are also featured, including 'a theatre school and dance group in Norwich, dance in Hackney and an academy of music and the performing arts in Luton' (Adamson, 2004: 5). Alternative forms of schemes such as Rochdale's planned Youth Tolerance Zones, planning to provide the youth with less formal venues in which to meet, are also implemented (Adamson, 2004). These schemes aim to revitalise inner city communities by restoring their life and flair, and by improving their moral and physical environments (Geason and Wilson, 1988). Geason and Wilson (1988: 16) stated that 'they removed young people from trouble and kept an eye on them; and allowed them to take part in activities that interested them'. Since boredom is a result of a lack of interest, creativity, sensation and/or novelty, then these schemes may be an effective way of counteracting it, as they can provide teenagers with all of the above if done correctly.

Research suggests however, that 'merely introducing young people at risk of offending to sport or leisure activities is unlikely to reduce criminality' (Adamson, 2004: 5). These schemes and leisure activities are still ran by society, with rules and regulations, opening and closing times, and authority figures. Therefore, it may be argued that they are more ways in which society controls its population, which may mean that they do not provide the instant satisfaction and excitement that criminal 'edgework' does because they are part of the social norm. By taking part they are arguably adhering to the rules and routinisation of modern society, which is to blame for boredom in the first place, so rebellion will naturally take over.

Examples of this in practice are described in a chapter in the book titled *Vandalism*, edited by Colin Ward. The examples talk about the activities of a few groups of children in Bradford:

In the winter, the playgrounds that had been provided in Bradford's Victorian parks, had locks on the rocking horses and had their swings removed in respect to health

and safety. In one of these parks, a group of six – year – olds were found to be smashing the locks that chained their rocking horse in fits of rebellion. Around the corner was a drive – in supermarket where another group of ten to eleven year olds had stripped down several trolley baskets and were using them as a form of toboggan. Around the front of the supermarket, the children had created a complex game of tag and climbing, using pallets stacked in various heights.

(Taylor and Walton, 1973 in Ward, 1973)

There is no doubt that these activities are taken part in all over the country. The emphasis on these delinquent activities is the potential danger present (Taylor and Walton, 1973 in Ward, 1973). Childcare officers and welfare workers express worry at how children prefer to play in supermarket car parks than in designated parkland areas, however, they fail to realise that ‘the park, stripped of its playground hardware, is a bore. And it provides nothing in the way of adventure and risk’ (Taylor and Walton, 1973 in Ward, 1973: 94 – 95). This danger, adventure and risk of delinquent activity are all components of the ‘edgework’ experience, which is a natural way of reducing boredom, and may have been the only activities the working class had thrilling enough to vent this boredom.

The argument is that since entertainment and communications media has evolved and been made available, the youth have other ways to reduce their boredom which can mimic the real life criminal and delinquent ‘edgework’ in a virtual environment, with violent media such as violent and delinquent video games or television programmes. This would mean that individuals may gain the same sense of risk, danger and adventure they get from criminal and delinquent ‘edgework’ that they need in order to reduce their boredom, without committing the acts for real, therefore, reducing crime in the process (see chapter 6). However, the question should be asked that if individuals don’t take part in sports because it doesn’t provide the necessary level of instant excitement and satisfaction that criminal ‘edgework’ does, is it plausible to argue then, that entertainment and communications media can give a big enough thrill to distract people from crime? The answer is subjective; however, media can provide an avenue to, in a virtual sense, rebel from society, which sports or other schemes cannot. In order to verify this theory, further research involving ethnographic study and open questionnaires would be beneficial in order to provide solid evidence and verification.

5.3. Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Alcohol and drug abuse is a major problem in many communities, especially rural communities. In 2004 and 2005, eleven million Americans suffered from alcohol and illicit drug dependence (Corvinelli, 2007), and in the UK it is estimated that 5% of individuals aged between 16 and 59 use drugs every month (Davies et al, 2011). It is believed in research that there is a ‘causal link between leisure boredom and high – risk health behaviours such as substance abuse’ (Patterson and Pegg, 1999). Substance abuse is another form of ‘edgework’ due to its high risk and the blurring of the boundaries between consciousness and unconsciousness. It is another way to give life back some of its creativity and spontaneity. A 30 year – old from Dumfries stated that ‘half of it is boredom. People have nothing to do’ (Brocklehurst, 2005). It is stated in many government and media agencies research that boredom is a major cause of drug and alcohol dependence. BBC health explains that a lack of stimulation leaves your body feeling bored and isolated, leading to self – harmful actions such as drug and alcohol abuse (BBC Health, 2011). So if 31.9% of a Canadian high school reported boredom in school and 30% stated that they were also bored outside of school

(Patterson and Pegg, 1999), then there is an existence of many potential drug and alcohol ‘edgeworkers’ blamed on the feelings of boredom.

This drug and alcohol abuse ‘edgework’ naturally leads to a rise in criminal and delinquent behaviour, not just for the reason that drug abuse is in itself a crime, but also due to the effects that these substances may have on a person’s morals or personality. For example, in 2011, crime statistics showed that there were 392,787 offences that could be related to alcohol (Collins, 2011). It is not just violent crime such as assault or grievous bodily harm that can be attributed to alcoholism. In six English cities in 1998 and 1999, significant proportions of individuals arrested for a variety of different crimes such as burglary, joyriding, criminal damage or robbery, tested positive for alcohol (Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2011). It’s not just alcohol that causes these types of crimes. A high proportion of those arrested in the six English cities also tested positive for drugs. Crimes committed because of drug abuse is not only due to the effects shaping individuals personality, but is also committed in order to gain necessary funds to fuel their addictions. These crimes may include robbery, burglary, drugs trafficking and more.

The argument put forward is that entertainment and communications media advancement over the last fifteen years has reduced the need to take part in ‘edgework’ involving the abuse of drugs and alcohol in order to stave off boredom. This media advancement can be thought to provide a legitimate, alternative form of ‘edgework’, with the necessary thrills and excitement to reduce boredom and keep people away from substance abuse. There has been ‘an 11 percent decline in drug use by 8th, 10th and 12th grade students’ (HHS Press Office, 2010) in the US, and drug use in the UK is at its lowest numbers since records began (Campbell, 2011). This correlates with the fifteen – year crime drop, and supports the fact that modern day media advancements may be playing a part in reducing criminal ‘edgework’ by tackling the problem of boredom. However, further research would be beneficial in order to provide more solid evidence for the link between the advancement in entertainment and communications media, and the reduction in drug and alcohol related crime.

Chapter 6: The Impact of Modern Day Violent Media on Violent Criminal ‘Edgework’

6.1. Background

It is a fact that screen based violent entertainment such as movies, video games, television shows or Internet games/videos, is a common sight in modern day society. As the contemporary world gets more and more technologically orientated, the exposure of violent entertainment is only going to increase, so the impact it has on violent criminal ‘edgework’ should be addressed. Special attention should be given to the possible impact of violent video games because it’s ‘one of the newest and most prominent sources of screen – based media violence’ (Funk et al, 2004: 24). It also allows participation in, and to an extent, the creation of violent actions, instead of simply being a content recipient or observer like in movies or television shows (Funk et al, 2004). This gives a further sense of immersion, which will more likely have an impact on an individual’s real life violent criminal ‘edgework’.

It is known that ‘up to 90% of all video games contain some sort of violent content; at least half of these games include actions that have the potential for serious harm against game characters’ (Funk, 2005: 401), and that in 2008, 97% of those aged 12 to 17 played video games, with two thirds of them playing games which involve violence (Miller, 2011). So if the popular and criminally violent video game Grand Theft Auto IV produced around \$500 million over 5 days (Stuart, 2011), the high level of exposure that people have to violence in video games is clearly evident. In the case of TV shows, a Canadian study reported that in 2001, there were 40 acts of violence per hour on TV (Media Awareness Network, 2010), so if the average teenager in the U.S. watches 3 hours and 20 minutes of TV each day (Media Literacy Clearing House, 2011), then the level of exposure to violence through TV viewing is high.

There is a popular belief amongst researchers, organisations and the general public, that this high exposure to modern day violent media, especially violent video games, can contribute to committing real life violent criminal ‘edgework’ as a result of re-enactments, desensitisation or the need for a greater thrill. However, there is an increasingly present opposing argument to this, suggesting that exposure to violent media may more realistically be decreasing violent criminal ‘edgework’ by reducing the need for it in real life.

6.2. Violent Media Causes Violent Criminal ‘Edgework’

‘The typical American child will view more than 200,000 acts of violence, including more than 16,000 murders before aged 18’ (Beresin, 2010). These will be viewed in various media sources such as movies, television or video games. The popular belief and assumption is that the high exposure to media violence at a young age can increase the likelihood that children will exhibit violent or aggressive behaviours towards live or inanimate victims (Drabman & Thomas, 1974). This has been stated and reiterated many times through the popular press and other published works, and has been of immense interest to policymakers over the years (Savage, 2004). Many violent crimes have been blamed on violent media, a prime example being the Jamie Bulger murder, which was blamed on the movie *Child’s Play 3* (Morrison, 2003). It is claimed that media violence increases the risk of violent crime in the same way that growing up in a violent environment increases the risk of violent crime (Huesmann & Taylor, 2006). Video games are believed to be the most harmful because they can effectively ‘act as virtual rehearsals for actual violence’ (Miller, 2011), so are the most likely to cause real life violent criminal ‘edgework’.

There are a number of ways in which modern day violent media is said to cause violent crime. It can be suggested that individuals may begin with being able to fulfil their ‘edgework’ needs by committing violent crime within a video game, or viewing violent crime in television shows or movies. However, eventually this level of thrill, power and control may not be sufficient enough to satisfy, leading to real life violent criminal ‘edgework’ being committed through re – enactments of violence viewed in the media.

This imitation of violent media material is part of the social learning approach to understanding the effects of media violence (Ferguson, 2010 in Ferguson, 2010). The social learning approach involves models of aggression such as the General Aggression Model, which suggests that ‘watching violent media leads to the development of violent *scripts*’ (Ferguson, 2010 in Ferguson, 2010: 42). Those people who possess more violent *scripts* will naturally react more violently than those with less (Ferguson, 2010 in Ferguson, 2010), meaning there is more chance of them reverting to violent ‘edgework’ sufficient enough to be

criminal. These violent scripts may manifest not just as instant reactions, but also as premeditated acts of violence. For example, various shooting sprees in America have been blamed on violent video games, including the 1999 Columbine School Massacre (Tompkins, 2003), where the offenders are said to be mimicking the actions of characters in games. It was even rumoured that 'one of them had practised for the raid by creating a mock up of their school using a map editor from one of their favourite first person shooters' (Carden, 2009).

It is also said that individuals become more violent after viewing and committing violence in a virtual environment because of a desensitising effect. 'Desensitisation means the attenuation or elimination of cognitive, emotional, and, ultimately, behavioural responses to a stimuli' (Funk et al, 2004: 25). Emotional desensitisation involves the numbing of emotional reactions to situations that would normally gain a strong response (Funk et al, 2004). Cognitive desensitisation involves the change in the belief that violence is uncommon and unlikely, into the belief that violence is inevitable and mundane (Funk et al, 2004). The way in which desensitisation to violence may shape the behavioural responses to a stimuli include the 'failure to intervene to stop violence or the active commission of a violent act' (Funk, 2005: 403). Emotional and cognitive desensitisation may cause an individuals use of violence to be without empathy, so the use of it as a form of criminal 'edgework' may increase in seriousness, as there would be no feelings of guilt to reverse the thrill of the situation.

Despite this popular belief, realistically there is no evidence to suggest that violent video games cause an increase in the application of real life violent criminal 'edgework'. 'Several well regarded reviews have concluded that the current body of research is unable to support the argument that the fantasy violence of games [and other types of violent media] leads to real life violence' (Olson, 2004: 148). The problems in many studies that claim modern day violent media causes violence, is that discussions of limitations fall by the wayside, meaning that they are not addressed in the way they should be (Olson, 2004). In the case of school shootings blamed on video games, it was found that the most common shared trait among these perpetrators was a history of suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts (Olson, 2004). There was no mention of a shared love of violent video games. Also, the fact seems to be ignored, that millions of people view various types of violent media on a regular basis, but do not commit real life violent criminal 'edgework'.

6.3. Violent Media Reduces Violent Criminal 'Edgework'

The opposing view is that viewing modern day violent media may actually be beneficial. It may actually provide an effective substitute for the feelings of real life violent criminal 'edgework'. It doesn't just take away available time, or provide an avenue to reduce boredom, but it also acts as a substitute for the real life experience. A study by the Centre for Mental Health and Media, on the impact violent video games have on young people, concluded that while a small number of youths may become more aggressive after playing violent games, for the vast majority, playing violent video games may be a normal part of development (Miller, 2011).

People who have the tendency for real life violent criminal 'edgework', may find the same feelings when viewing violent media, meaning that they don't have to resort to real life circumstances to achieve the same 'edgework' feelings. They may gain the same feelings of exhilaration, self – determination, self – actualization, and self – realization they gain from real life violent criminal 'edgework', by for example, playing the multiplayer mode on Call of Duty, or viewing gory horror movies. After all, 'research suggests that... offenders seek to

maximise their rewards while minimising effort and risk' (Strodtbeck and Short, 1964 cited in Sutton, 2012: 18), so the arrival of modern day violent media such as online multiplayer as 'edgework' may be a sufficient enough thrill to reduce the need for real life violent criminal 'edgework' (Sutton, 2012).

Statistics on violent crime rates over the last fifteen or so years seem to provide some evidence for this opposing view. Data from federal criminal justice agencies show that serious violent crimes among youths have gone down since 1996, which correlates with the large increase in video game sales (Miller, 2011). 'Between 1994 and 2001, arrests for murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assaults fell 44%, resulting in the lowest juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes since 1983. Murder arrests, which reached a high of 3,800 in 1993, fell to 1,400 in 2001' (Olson, 2004: 145). Since adolescents are some of the main perpetrators of violent crime, and the main participants in video game activity, it is safe to assume that there is a possible link here.

There is evidence to suggest that for some, the need for the thrill and rebellion of violent 'edgework' is innate, and violent media can give people an avenue to express this without committing any crimes. According to biological positivism, which suggests that some people are more prone to violent or criminal behaviour due to their individual biological makeup, the craving for violence can be linked with aberrations in the activity and metabolism of the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine, which can increase stimulation seeking behaviours (Fishbein, 1998). Therefore, the fact that viewing violent media substitutes for real life violent criminal 'edgework', essentially means that 'people who are likely to commit violent crimes might be able to get their violence "fix" by playing video games instead of committing crimes' (Carden, 2009). Also, according to biological positivism, higher levels of testosterone have also been linked with high levels of aggression. High testosterone levels in males cause them to have a low tolerance, which makes them easily provoked and more likely to respond violently (Williams, 2004). Those with higher levels of testosterone may also benefit from using violent media as a way of gaining their 'fix' of violence.

The Catharsis Model supports this theory as it suggests that 'aggression is primarily a biological drive that requires expression' (Lorenz, 1963 cited in Ferguson, 2010 in Ferguson, 2010: 43). It suggests that media violence provides an outlet or release for aggressive drives, leading to a reduced amount of violent criminal 'edgework' (Ferguson, 2010 in Ferguson, 2010). The relationship between pornography and sex crimes also provides support, as separate empirical studies by Winai Wongsur and Todd Kendall show that access to Internet pornography is associated with reductions in sex crime (Carden, 2009). So sex addicts can gain the same 'fix' in a virtual environment that they can in real life situations, which is the same as what may be the case for those who crave criminal 'edgework' in the form of violence.

The question can be asked however, as to whether it is actually plausible to suggest that viewing modern day violent media can substitute for the experience of real life violent criminal 'edgework'. Is it plausible to state that viewing violent media can create the same feelings that participating in real life violence does? After all, the idea that violent media substitutes for crime assumes that people have no other motivations to commit crime other than for the experience. The answer is currently subjective, however to date, research does not seem to support either of the opposing arguments about the effects of media violence on real life violent criminal 'edgework' (Ferguson, 2010 in Ferguson, 2010). Ferguson (2010) in Ferguson (2010: 44) states that 'evidence supporting the catharsis model has been virtually

absent'. However, it is still an interesting concept that would benefit from further research that incorporates the notion of 'edgework'.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine whether the 15 year crime drop in the Western world is due to the advancement in entertainment and communications media reducing the need to take part in criminal activity. The study analysed the Criminal 'Edgework' Alternative Hypothesis, which suggests that the advancement of modern day media provided alternative, legal and affordable ways in which to fulfil people's natural need for 'edgework', which serves as both a substitute and a distraction from taking part in criminal 'edgework'.

The study is another attempt to further our knowledge about crime trends in order to produce a reliable and adaptable plan that aims to tackle the many issues within crime reduction. There have been many other suggestions previously put forward about the reasons for the crime drop, with the four main ones being 'increased number of police, the prison population, the decline of crack markets and legalised abortion' (Farrell et al, 2010: 26). However, currently there is no widely accepted explanation of the general crime drop as the hypotheses put forward suffer from a lack of validity and plausibility as they are partly tested, largely untested or have not been adequately explored (Farrell et al, 2010). This study aims to fill the gap in literature on the relationship between the notion of 'edgework', and the advancement in entertainment and communications media, and whether this modern day media can reduce incidences of criminal 'edgework'.

It was initially suggested that the communications revolution would bring about negative consequences for society. For example, movies and video games have long been blamed for desensitising young people to violence, contributing to an increase in real life violent 'edgework'. However, allegations like these are not supported by research evidence beyond anecdotal examples (Sutton et al, 2012), so this popular perception can be challenged, especially as technological advancement correlates with a 15 year crime drop. Routine Activities Theory would support this as it suggests that crime changes due to larger shifts in society (Felson & Boba, 2010 cited in Sutton, 2010). The shift in society being the advancement in entertainment and communications media, and the crime change being the 15 year crime drop.

The argument put forward is that modern day entertainment and communications media provides the same exhilarating and self – determining 'edgework' experience as crime, without having to leave the house. Chapter 4 shows how the use of modern day media technologies has grown exponentially, and whether these technologies are affordable enough to be accessible to the working class. If they are not accessible to the working class then the 15 year crime drop will most likely have nothing to do with the communications revolution, as they are the group in society who commit the most crime. It was found that to gain specific figures on the media consumption of the working class is problematic, and further research would be needed to provide this theory with validation. However, the increasing amount of media consumption compared with the high percentage of working class citizens suggests that they do have reasonable access. The chapter also suggests that the high levels of media consumption results in there being less time for crime, as both victims and offenders would spend more time in their homes. However, it can be argued that the 15 year crime drop in the

offline world may be facilitating in the online world in the form of crimes such as fraud. This is a concept that would involve further research.

It was argued that the routinisation of modern day society brought with it a mass extermination of human spontaneity, and as a result, an increase in crime blamed on the feelings of boredom. However, chapter 5 suggests that the advancement in entertainment and communications media can provide the same 'edgework' experience as crime, which is sufficient enough to reduce boredom. Therefore the need to take part in a criminal 'edgework' activity in order to counteract boredom will be reduced. The chapter suggests that sports and government schemes cannot provide the necessary thrill and rebellion from society that modern day media can in order to reduce criminal 'edgework'. However, questions can be asked regarding the validity of the theory, challenging whether it is plausible to suggest that sports cannot provide the same 'edgework' feelings as modern day media. The chapter also suggests that entertainment and communications media can provide the excitement necessary to keep people away from substance abuse, however further research is needed to provide solid evidence for this link.

The final area of focus in the dissertation looked at whether violent media causes or reduces criminal 'edgework'. The popular belief is that violent media causes crime, however, this belief has been increasingly challenged in recent years. While both arguments put forward are convincing, there is little evidence of a link for either of the opposing theories. However, the research would benefit from further study incorporating the notion of 'edgework' into the equation.

Overall, the technological advancement of entertainment and communications media in the modern world does provide another possible, plausible explanation for the 15 year crime drop. There are numerous arguments that support the Criminal 'Edgework' Alternative Hypothesis, however, ultimately the research suffers from the same drawbacks that other explanations of the crime drop suffer from. The hypothesis is untested and lacks the necessary amount of research required to provide enough solid evidence for it to be a widely accepted explanation of the crime drop. This is mainly due to time constraints and the small – scale nature of the study placing limitations on how expansive the research needs to be in order to prove the hypothesis. In order to address these issues in the future, widespread and complex research needs to be done, possibly involving ethnographic study focusing on the changes in the criminal behaviour of many individuals after being exposed to modern day entertainment and communications media.

Word count – 10,975

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