

True Crime—A Genre’s Influence, Responsibility, and Accountability

By Blake Rathie

In the wake of mass violence becoming increasingly more prevalent in recent years, the true crime genre has had a surge of popularity rather than becoming a taboo subject, making it extremely marketable and in demand to the point that there is an annual convention called [CrimeCon](#).

According to Variety, the first two seasons of the popular true crime podcast “Serial” has had more than 340 million downloads and beat all podcast records when it aired in 2014. However, there is an underlying danger that arises from the genre through the fetishising way in which violent criminals are presented, and greater concerns become apparent through how media presents insights towards killers’ mentalities, influencing their audiences to sympathise with murderers instead of humanising the tragedies of the victims.

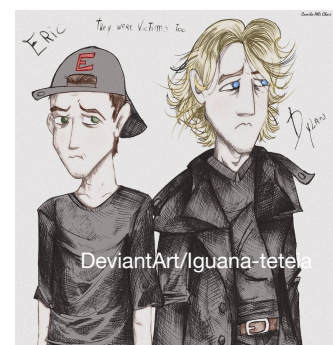
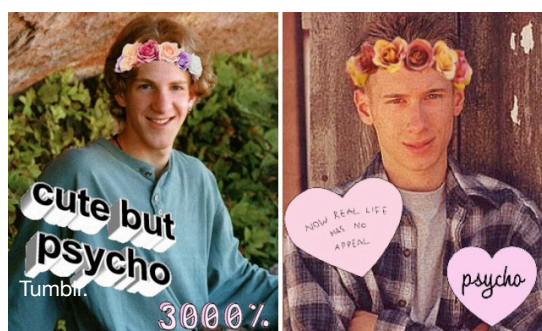
The media is reluctant to report on suicides due to the potential of copycats, but killers are still given immense attention, as has been evident in the aftermath of Ivan Millat’s recent death that has garnered much coverage, such as [60 Minute’s](#) 41 minute story on Millat.

Data from the NBC justifies concerns of copycats as the data shows that there have been more than 230 school shootings since the Columbine massacre in 1990. These school shooters are still reported on in the same way as the Columbine killers; with their names, pictures, backstories, and victims listed, similar to that of a video-game scoreboard.

It is irresponsible to make the true crime genre and media a scapegoat for where blame lies in these tragedies of mass violence, especially when there are the more immediate issues of mental health and gun control. Despite this, the publicised way media presents criminals is harmful when they are made into figures that people can relate to and view as role models, like the more fanatical members of the true crime community do.

People interested in this genre are so for different reasons, one fan from the TCC (true crime community) subreddit states their interest in the genre comes from their desire to “delve into the brain of the killer,” and find out “what made them think this was okay to do.” Another reddit user describes their interest being biological, because “in evolutionary terms, it makes sense that we would want to be aware of potential threats to our life and learn all we can about them, in hopes of surviving a deadly encounter of our own if it comes.”

Unlike these fans, there are more obsessive individuals that make up smaller sub-communities, who, like Justin Bieber’s ‘Beliebers,’ label themselves as ‘Columbiners,’ a group that make sexualised and romantic fan art and fiction of the Columbine killers.



The baseline interest in true crime that makes up the majority of the fanbase is harmless, but it is truly concerning that there are obsessive super fans that glorify the actions of killers and are insensitive towards victims. These super fans are not a new occurrence, as the serial killer Ted Bundy was much loved and had a large following which still exists today, calling themselves ‘Ted Heads.’

Through turning killers from criminals to celebrities, people are influenced into identifying with them, and on the other side of the girls who see these killers as broken boys and perfect boyfriends, there are those who see them as role models. The perpetrator of the Santa Fe High School shooting is one example of this, wearing a black trench coat and firing a sawed-off shotgun while he murdered 10 people, in imitation of the Columbine shooters.

A common trait found in these copycat killers is that they found that they could relate to the Columbine boys’ struggles of being bullied, and that they empathised with their well-reported mindsets. This influences them to follow in their footsteps and the Virginia Tech shooter’s manifesto emphasises this, where he called the Columbine killers by their first names and referenced them as, “we martyrs.”

While presenters of this genre largely treat victims with respect and do not condone the actions of killers, they do go into such depth that people can empathise and relate to these killers, which is a significant issue.

Peter Langman, psychologist and author of “Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters,” states that in regard to these killings, “the more there are, the more there will be,” because “the phenomenon is feeding on itself.” The media propagates this seemingly contagious violence through the sensationalism and fixation it presents. As reported by a [New York Times](#) article, “school gunmen have admitted to investigators that they were now effectively competing with other attackers, in trying to come up with deadlier tactics, and in trying to kill the most people.”

There are fans and presenters that believe measures need to be implemented in order to break the cycle of the phenomenon Langman wrote about, and to refocus the media’s attention and audience’s sympathies.

Brod, from the Australian podcast “Felon True Crime,” acknowledges these issues within the genre and actively tries to tell stories differently, by trying to “share stories in a way that shows victims of violent crime in the best possible light and portrays the perpetrator in the worst.” This is because Brod believes “approaching true crime stories this way minimises the glorification and sensationalism of serial killers/ murderers,” also finding that “focussing on the personal lives of victims and addressing them by their first names creates more of a sense of empathy for them and their loved ones.”



The names and stories of killers are far better remembered and dramatised than that of the victims, and this is what many find to be the main problem with the genre. From the TCC subreddit, there is a fan that wants to see changes in true crime, such as killers being given a

“generic description or a number” so that they couldn’t be identified or stand out. Brod from “True Crime Felon” holds a similar perspective and typically refers to the perpetrators “by their surname and tries not to focus on elements of their background that could be seen to excuse/justify their actions.” By blunting the killers’ personal marks, and personalising the victims instead, they believe it could dissuade potential future killers motivated by fame or role models.

The immensely popular genre of true crime allures its fans for different reasons, some with the entirely wrong intentions. There are both fans and presenters that see issues within this genre, so a push to implement this different focus of true crime may make a difference for the better. Due to personalising victims, rather than fetishising killers, it becomes much more difficult for those at-risk individuals to relate to these killers and go down a similar path. This new focus on true crime would instead expose them to the tragedy of the life lost and the error of these killers’ actions.