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À l'aide de données recueillies lors de la couverture d'événements par la presse locale, on examine comment a été présenté le meurtre d'un jeune de 15 ans, Jordan Manners, commis dans une école secondaire de Toronto. En particulier, on cherche à comprendre pourquoi, après avoir d'abord tenté de contextualiser l'événement en fonction d'autres cas de tireurs dans des écoles, les médias ont ensuite adopté un cadre d'interprétation basé sur des présuppositions idéologiques liées aux classes marginales de Toronto. Quand les médias veulent absolument couvrir un événement malgré l'absence de renseignements essentiels, on note qu'ils on tendance à reprendre des cadres conformistes. Dans la conclusion, on étudie la signification sociopolitique de ces cadres essentialisés pour les crimes commis dans les collectivités pauvres, habitées principalement par des personnes de couleur.

Mots clés : constructionnisme, média, crime, tireur dans les écoles, classes marginales

Using data gathered from local press coverage, this article examines how the shooting death of 15-year-old Jordan Manners at a Toronto high school was framed. In particular, we seek to explain why the media's initial attempt to contextualize the event vis-à-vis the tragedy of past school shootings eventually gave way to an interpretive frame rooted in ideological presuppositions about Toronto's underclass. We argue that when the media are confronted with a "must cover" event but lack essential information, the tendency is to adopt pre-existing, consonant frameworks. We conclude by exploring the socio-political significance of such essentializing frames vis-à-vis crime in poor communities inhabited mainly by people of colour.

Keywords: constructionism, media, crime, school shooting, underclass

On 23 May 2007, a 15-year-old boy was shot and killed in a Toronto high school, the first event of its kind in Canada's largest city.

According to the local press, Jordan Manners, a grade-9 student who attended C.W. Jefferys Collegiate (CWJC), was shot in the chest in a hallway not far from the school's cafeteria. Immediately after Manners was found wounded on the floor, the school was placed under a four-hour "lockdown," meaning no one but authorities could leave or enter the school. Four days later, two 17-year-old male suspects were arrested and charged with first-degree murder. At a press conference, members of the Toronto Police Service revealed that the two accused lived in the same neighbourhood as Manners and that their identities could not be released as a result of the restrictions imposed by the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA): The police offered no additional information.

Although the media initially sought to contextualize Manners's death by referring to previous school shootings (e.g., Dawson College or W.R. Myers High School in Taber, Alberta), within approximately 48 hours, a very different, dominant framework appeared, one that framed the killing as if it were a tragedy that had its roots in the very nature of Toronto's black, urban "underclass."[2] What makes this transition or frame-change (see Hsiang and McCombs 2004) entirely unique, however, is the following: Because the school was locked down and there was no information pertaining to the motives and identities of the accused (and, at the time of this writing, there still isn't), all attempts by the media to explain the event were inevitably grounded in speculation. Thus, the pertinent questions are, How does one account for this transition? and, Given myriad alternatives, why did the press opt for the underclass framework in particular?

Using data gathered from an analysis of local press coverage, we offer the following argument. The media was confronted with a newsworthy event that appeared to have all the markings of "another school shooting;" however, in the absence of critical information, the organizational requirement of producing a viable story encouraged the adoption of a well-established interpretive framework. Leaving behind the initial references to prior school shootings and the culturally engrained imagery they now seem to evoke, the media embraced the well-recognized urban underclass framework and constructed Manners's death as if it were an anticipated extension of the neighbourhood's troubled history.

We begin with a review of the literature looking at the media's role in the construction of crime as a social problem, followed by a more

directed examination of how school shootings in particular have been constructed in North America. Following a review of our methodology, the genesis of the urban underclass framework is examined. We then conclude by exploring the social and political implications of these dynamics in relation to (a) what we know about the media's role in the construction of criminal events and (b) how the media and other claims-makers are responsible for perpetuating discriminatory ideologies that have serious implications for understanding crime and violence in disadvantaged Canadian communities.

Literature review

This study draws heavily from two interrelated bodies of literature: social constructionism as it pertains to the media's role in the construction of crime as a social problem and the literature on school violence and/or school shootings. Our analysis will move back and forth between these two areas, tying them together whenever possible.

For the past 15 to 20 years, constructionism has had a profound impact on how social scientists understand the nature of social problems. The work of Blumer (1970) and Spector and Kitsuse (1977), for example, provided important critiques of conventional social-problems research by calling for a focus on the *processes* through which problems are defined, responded to, and maintained over time. Thus, *social problem status* was not to be understood as an objective condition but rather as a function of the claims made by individuals or groups who sought the problematization of a particular condition (Blumer 1970; Loseke 2003). Social problems are, therefore, not to be seen as inherently immoral or problematic conditions but merely as definitions of and orientations to putative conditions (Miller and Holstein 1993; Spector and Kitsuse 1977).

Constructionism has also had a profound influence on how scholars understand the relationship between the media's depiction of crime, on the one hand, and public perceptions of crime, on the other (see Beckett 1994; Best 1991; 2002; Fishman 1979; Sacco 2005). Though perhaps antithetical to strict versions of constructionism (see Woolgar and Pawluch 1985), its appeal stems, in part, from its ability to help explain the media's tendency to distort and amplify crime-related news (see Doyle 2006; Fishman 1979; Orcutt and Turner 1993). For example, scholars have long argued that while the media tend to focus on

crimes of violence (see Doyle 2006; Jenkins 1994; Sacco 2005), official police data suggest violent crime represents a relatively small proportion of all reported criminal activity. This trend toward distortion or what some moral-panic scholars might call *disproportionality* (see Burns and Crawford 1999; Cohen 1972) often leads to a self-reinforcing media hype (Vasterman 2005) that derives much of its momentum from the sheer profitability of crime-related news and the extent to which crime news caters to the organizational requirements of the news industry (see Sacco 2000; 2005).

Also of interest is the research examining how the media have constructed school shootings as a serious social problem worthy of public attention. In his analysis of post-Columbine media coverage, Muschert (2007a), for example, reveals the extent to which the media have perpetuated the myth of the child "super predator" – a vicious killer utterly devoid of feelings and incapable of remorse. Thus, according to Herda-Rapp (2003), the media have helped to usher in a new typology of school shootings: They are brutal crimes committed by young, white males in suburban or rural hamlets across the United States. These shootings are pitched as a new kind of violence, perpetrated in areas once thought to be immune from malevolence of such magnitude.[3]

Burns and Crawford (1999), for example, argue that, in contradistinction to the media-generated moral panic, American data suggests that "recent school shootings were idiosyncratic events and not part of any recognizable trend" (155). Similarly, Best (2002) refers to school shootings as a "phantom epidemic" brought on by the media's intense coverage of particular events and its affinity for statistical distortion. Moreover, research indicates that intense coverage of school shootings over time is, in part, a function of the media's tendency to engage in "frame-changing" (Hsiang and McCombs 2004: 22) as a means of keeping news about school shootings salient. That said, constructionist research has allowed scholars to contrast what is believed to be the reality of school shootings with their image in public and media discourse.

In the post-Columbine era, popular and media discourse have tended to construct school shootings in a rather dark, typological form: A bullied, marginalized, and seemingly deranged young male leaves innocent victims in his wake while shocking the community (see Burns and Crawford 1999; Herda-Rapp 2003; Killingbeck 2001; Springhall 1999). Victims, too, have been constructed in rather

predictable ways as young, promising citizens, whose suburban or rural refuge from a heartless world is irrevocably violated. As Muschert (2007a) argues, school shootings as ''problem-defining events'' have come to characterize the state of youth violence in North America, where threats to and threats *from* children now play a pivotal role in prevailing discourses of fear (see also Altheide 2002; Muschert 2007b).

It is, therefore, not surprising that scholars have focused so intently on the etiology of school shootings and that myriad explanations had come to the fore (see Muschert 2007b). For some, answers can be found in prevailing constructions of heterosexual masculinity and the alienation experienced by those unable or unwilling to conform (see Danner and Carmody 2001; Kimmel and Mahler 2003; Klein 2006). Others have set their sights on the impact of violent media, popular culture, or access to firearms (Springhall 1999; see also Lawrence and Birkland 2004). More comprehensive explanations have focused on the intersection of community, family, and organizational relations within the school environment (Newman 2004; Springhall 1999; see also Muschert 2007b).

However, in this article we are not principally concerned with the objective causes of school shootings, nor are we interested in furthering the development of a school shooting typology as proposed by Muschert (2007b). Instead, we seek to explain why and under what circumstances particular constructions of school shootings emerge. Thus, with respect to the event in question, given the absence of information about a motive or about the offenders' identities, we attempt to understand why the killing of Manners was initially framed in relation to past school shootings before quickly being recast as if it were a ''targeted shooting'' carried out within the broader context of an underclass social environment (see Muschert 2007a). Borrowing from constructionist research and from media studies scholarship, we seek answers to this issue, prompted as it was by the unusual circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Jordan Manners on 23 May 2007.

Methodology

The data collected for this article were derived using a case-study content analysis that, according to Altheide (1987), involves the reflexive analysis of textual documents so as to understand the

communication of meaning in and of itself while forming and verifying theoretical concepts. In a more concrete sense, content analysis also involves the identification of important patterns, themes, and apparent biases (see Dowler 2006; Weber 1985). In total, 266 newspaper articles from three widely circulated news- papers – the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, and the *Toronto Star* – were obtained from the Canadian Newsstand (CN) electronic database. Borrowing from Ericson et al. (1989), these newspapers can be classified into two publication categories: *quality* and *mass*. As national papers with a history of catering to the middle- and upper-class business communities, the somewhat conservative *Globe and Mail* and *National Post* (''quality'' publications) claim to be concerned with matters of national and international significance (see Ramp 2000: 32). As a ''mass'' publication, the *Toronto Star* attempts to appeal to both ends of the market, while generally espousing a more liberal point of view than the other two. These three newspapers represent a significant proportion of the daily print media in Toronto.

The 266 articles were electronically sourced using the key words ''Jordan Manners.'' The search spanned a period of one year, begin- ning with the day of Jordan's death – 23 May 2007 – and ending on 23 May 2008. Thematic coding was then carried out through a process of systematically reviewing each article while paying particular atten- tion to how the event was framed. According to Entman (1993), to frame something is to select ''some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpreta- tion, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation'' (52). Of particular interest was whether the article attempted to explain or contextualize the killing and, if so, how this was done. Finally, the date of the article's publication relative to Manners's death was also recorded.

Was it "another" school shooting?

Manners's death attracted considerable media attention. Once news broke that a shooting had taken place at CWJC, the media began searching for details about the event while gathering outside the school, which had already been placed in lockdown. A line of yellow police tape circled the school and no one, including the press, was permitted to enter. There were also reports that two

television helicopters were flying over the school trying to get live aerial coverage of the event.

Less than 24 hours later, media discourse began connecting the shooting death of Jordan Manners to past school shootings. For example, according to one report published the day after the event, "[O]utside, a crowd of anxious, grim-faced parents and family members massed along the police tape in front of the school. Many were frustrated with the waiting and uncertainty; they spoke of security concerns, of the shooting at *Virginia Tech and Dawson College*" (*National Post* 24 May 2007: A1; emphasis added). Similarly, the *Toronto Star* wrote,

> *The shooting comes a little more than a month after* a gunman killed 32 people at Virginia Tech before taking his own life. In September, a gunman at Montreal's Dawson College killed a student and wounded 19 others before he died from police gunfire. (*Toronto Star* 24 May 2007: A1; emphasis added)

Finally, and in a more detailed fashion, *Associated Content* reported,

> The last school shooting in [Ontario] occurred in 2000, when four students and a member of the staff were stabbed during an attack at Cairine Wilson High School in Orleans, Ontario. In September 2006, 25-year-old Kimveer Gill entered Dawson College located in Montreal. When Gill was done shooting, he had killed student Anastasia De Souza. Gill also injured 20 additional students before turning the gun on himself. *This shooting [Manners's] lies in the wake of the worst shooting in United States history* just last month at Virginia Tech. Student Cho Seung-hui killed 31 people on the campus and then killed himself. (24 May 2007; emphasis added)

In the latter two excerpts in particular, the media thematically connect Manners's death to the carnage of past school shootings by calling the reader's attention to a temporal sequence of similar events (i.e., "the shooting comes a little more than . . ." and "[t]his shooting lies in the wake of . . ."). By implication, Manners's death was therefore constructed as being part of a larger trend involving disturbed and/or marginalized young males killing their classmates.

What makes this early media discourse especially interesting are the circumstances under which it emerged. As mentioned above,

immediately after the shooting, the media had little, if any, information about what *actually* happened because (a) the school was placed immediately under lockdown; (b) the offenders had not been apprehended; and (c) unlike in the case of other school shootings, the offenders did not leave clues suggesting a potential motive.[4] Thus, we would argue that the initial placing of Manners's death in the context of past school shootings appears to have been a function of the media's need to organize and present the story quickly in a way that would be consonant with pre-existing conceptual frameworks (see Ericson et al. 1989) – a common media practice, often instrumental in the construction of what become known as crime trends or, under particular circumstances, crime "waves" (Fishman 1979; 1980; Sacco 2003; Loseke 2003).[5] However, when the media began interviewing neighbourhood residents, it did not take long before an entirely new frame emerged. While still lacking factual information, the news stories then began to suggest that Toronto had witnessed yet another teenager shot dead in a crime-ridden environment known for gang violence – references to past school shootings then ceased entirely.

Gangs, guns, and the underclass

The gang framework actually made its initial debut on the day of the shooting. The *Globe and Mail*, in an attempt to provide context, described the neighbourhood as a place where people "have long endured violent outbreaks of street crime" and where gangs known as "Bloods" and "Crips" were known to have operated (*Globe and Mail* 23 May 2007: A1) – an obvious nod to American gang culture. Less than 24 hours later and after all references to previous school shootings had ceased, the gang framework began to take its more robust form. The *National Post* acknowledged that two Toronto filmmakers featured Jordan Manners in a CBC documentary called *Lost in the Struggle*, which followed the lives of three young men who while involved in the illegal drug trade grew up in Toronto's notorious Jane and Finch neighbourhood.[6] Manners was said to have appeared in the film, but his role was apparently edited out before it was shown on the CBC public affairs program *The Fifth Estate* six months before he was killed (*National Post* 24 May 2007: A12). During an interview, filmmaker Paul Nguyen was asked what might have led to Manners's death. Nguyen suspected that Manners had been the victim of retaliation, commenting, "[F]rom what I heard, it was probably some sort of beef. Usually, that's the case anyway . . . I don't know specifically, but I just hear on the streets it's a beef. That's just what's

on the street" (*National Post* 24 May 2007: A12). Shortly thereafter, the media began interviewing residents in the area and soon embraced the gang framework wholeheartedly. For example, the *Toronto Star* embraced gang-related discourse by means of an interview with Stu Auty, Chair of Ontario's Safe Schools Task Force, who, in reference to Manners's death, stated, "Gangs are a form of family that can appeal to marginalized kids, kids who feel they're outside looking in" (*Toronto Star* 25 May 2007: A1). Another article in the same edition went one rhetorical step further when it asked, "Who and why would somebody hunt down and kill 15-year-old Jordan Manners in broad daylight inside his Toronto high school?" (*Toronto Star* 25 May 2007: B1). The article then proceeded to share portions of transcribed interviews with particular students who suggested Manners had been hanging out "with the wrong crowd and was a poor influence." Thus, on the basis of nothing more than speculation, the press opted to frame the event as though it was potentially gang-related.

Interestingly, everything changed when, on 29 May, the Toronto Police Service held a news conference to announce they had arrested two young offenders who could not be identified under the YCJA. As if deliberately calling into question the press's arbitrary decision to frame the event in relation to gangs, Toronto Police reported that, while the accused were thought to have known Manners, the event was "absolutely not gang-related" (Toronto Police Service 2007). Since only in rare and unusual circumstances does the YCJA permit the identities of offenders under the age of 18 to be released, the media found itself unable to shift its emphasis to considering exactly who the suspects were. Indeed, once it became apparent that the shooters might actually have been Manners's friends, or at the very least acquaintances, the media frame began to shift away from gangs as an explanatory framework, although not entirely. Broadly speaking, the event remained framed within the broader idiom of gang culture, both in the school and the community.

With the story now off the front page seven days after the shooting, one commentator noted that the tragedy was caused by "a larger culture of gun violence" and that "recent reports that CWJC was chaotic and often dangerous may be confirmed through an inquest" (*National Post* 31 May 2007: A13). The idea that not only the community but the high school was a dangerous place was reinforced when a former English teacher was quoted in the press saying that she "was not surprised at the shooting" and that her impression was that "the students were running the school." Finally, the teacher noted that

"students threw textbooks and even desks at teachers and once a group of male students surrounded a female teacher and repeatedly taunted her with chants of 'suck my d—.' The list is endless, she said" (*National Post* 31 May 2007: A13). In short, Toronto's print media appeared to be holding tightly to the remaining threads of a consonant and newsworthy framework that sought to position Manners's death in relation to gang culture.

The media's use of the gang culture framework was then predictably coupled with explanatory references to Toronto's "underclass." A former police officer and community activist who used to work to "undo gang violence in the schools during the 1990s" expressed his views about teens in the area: "They're confused about who their father is. Not that they don't have loving moms, but their influences, their role models are guys with guns, guys who act like thugs and act like gangsters" (qtd. in *National Post* 2 June 2007: A21). These views were reinforced in an op-ed that appeared in the *Globe and Mail* a few weeks after the shooting. Responding to a group of law students (Community and Legal Aid Services Program [CLASP]) who went to a middle school in the Jane-Finch area to do a presentation on legal rights, Margaret Wente drew the connection between gang culture and single-parent families: "Many students come from disorganized, single-mother families where discipline is scarce, and they have a multitude of learning problems. The unwitting effect of the messages the CLASP sends will be to keep things in the underclass forever" (*Globe and Mail* 12 June 2007: A21). For Rosie Dimanno of the *Toronto Star*, Manners's death was "symbolic of something rotting in our midst, it's a flesh-eating disease, a corrosion of respect that claims victims throughout the city, not just in the Jane-Finch corridor" (*Toronto Star* 1 June 2007: A6). Lest one imagine that Dimanno was envisioning a widespread deterioration of morality transcending race and class boundaries, she concluded with a more focused understanding of where the "flesh-eating disease" was taking its highest toll: "There have been, *especially up here in Jane-Finch*, too many funerals for slain youths" (emphasis added).

Interestingly, even though the press framed the CWJC as a violent school, there is clear evidence to suggest that neither the school nor its students conform to the frame of "lawless war zone" (Toronto District School Board [TDSB], 2008, Appendix H: i). In fact, on the basis of data currently available, comparisons can be made between levels of crime and victimization at CWJC and levels of crime and victimization in other Toronto high schools. Just one month after

Manners's death, the TDSB commissioned Julian Faulkner to write a report about school violence in Toronto and a self-report survey was administered at CWJC. The survey was anonymously completed by a total of 453 students, representing over 50% of the student body. The report compared data from this survey with the data collected from Toronto schools in 2000. The latter research – *The Toronto Youth Crime and Victimization Survey* – was carried out by two sociologists from the University of Toronto (Tanner and Wortley 2002) and undertook a random sample of 3,393 high school students from 30 different high schools in the Toronto region. Both surveys asked similar questions relating to crime and victimization. Despite the seven-year gap between surveys, the 2000 data did provide some opportunity to compare the experiences of CWJC students to the experiences of other high school students in the Greater Toronto Area. Such a comparison revealed the following:

- In 2007, 45% of the students from CWJC reported that they had been the victim of a minor theft in the previous two years. By contrast, in 2000, 38% of a random sample of Toronto high school students claimed that they had been the victim of a minor theft in the previous 12 months, with 72% indicating that they had been the victim of minor theft at sometime in their lives.
- In 2007, 39% of survey respondents from CWJC reported that they had received physical threats in the *previous two years.* By contrast, in 2000, 39% of Toronto High School students claimed that they had received physical threats in the *previous 12 months.*
- In 2007, 37% of C.W. Jefferys students claimed they had been physically assaulted at school in the previous two years. In 2000, 39% of Toronto high school students stated that they had been physically assaulted in the previous year.
- In 2007, 18% of CWJC students claimed that they had been threatened by someone with a weapon in the *previous two years*. By contrast, in 2000, 15% of Toronto high school students had received weapon threats in the *previous year*, and 28% had been threatened by a weapon at some time in their lives.
- In 2007, 11% of students from CWJC claimed that they were assaulted by someone with a weapon in the previous two years. In 2000, 8% of Toronto high school students indicated that they had been the victim of a weapons-related assault in the previous 12 months and 16% had been assaulted with a weapon at some time in their lives. (For the points in this list, see TDSB, Appendix H: vi)

The Faulkner Report concluded that the rates of victimization obtained from CWJC were not exceptional when compared to those obtained from other Toronto schools. "Put simply, crime and victimization may be a problem faced by students at many schools throughout the Toronto region and that life at C.W. Jefferys may not be particularly exceptional in this regard (*sic*)" (TDSB 2008, Appendix H: vii). Interestingly, even though the media covered the release of the Faulkner Report in January 2008, the trends noted here did not appear to alter the way in which Manners's death was framed.

Nevertheless, the framing of Jordan Manners's death was very much in keeping with the idea that the community at Jane and Finch represents an urban underclass, with a high concentration of welfare-dependent, visible-minority, single-parent households residing in subsidized housing. In recent years, concern and anxiety have been expressed in many western societies about how growing numbers of marginal groups have become culturally distinct from the "traditional" working class (see Dekeseredy, Alvi, Schwartz, and Tomaszewski 2003). Although ideas about an underclass have been expressed by people with different ideological viewpoints, from the perspective of the New Right, the withdrawal of the state over the past two decades has been justified by a discourse that visualizes the urban poor, single mothers, and many immigrants (particularly those of colour) as members of an underclass that is welfare dependent, reluctant to work, and highly criminalized (see Murray 1990). In fact, Garland has argued, in recent years, a discourse of the "alien other" has emerged, where criminals are represented as dangerous members of distinct racial and social groups that have little resemblance to "us." This otherness is juxtaposed with a dominant cultural discourse of family values, individual enterprise, and the limits of welfarism (Garland 1996: 460). We contend here that the way in which Manners's death was framed is consistent with this position.

While views about the existence of such an underclass remain popular (in fact, as noted earlier, the term *underclass* was used by the press to describe Manners's community), British and Canadian research has effectively criticized the underclass thesis. For example, in Britain, the underclass argument has been challenged on the grounds that birth rates for unmarried black mothers are not substantially greater than those for their unmarried white counterparts (Ellwood, and Summers 1986). Moreover, Murray's notion of the

underclass has been criticized for its reliance on anecdotal evidence, "case" histories, and a narrow interpretation of statistical data (David 1996).

In a recent summary of research examining the underclass thesis in Canada, Krahn, Lowe, and Hughes (2007) conclude,

> [T]he majority of Canada's poor are not welfare-dependent but "working poor," seeking to maintain their standard of living on jobs with low pay and short hours. There is actually considerable movement in and out of poverty as individuals lose jobs, move from social assistance to low paying jobs, become divorced, or enter retirement without adequate pensions. In regions or cities where unemployment is high, a great deal of productive work continues to take place in the informal economy, including subsistence work performed by street people and the homeless. Such widespread initiative is hardly evidence of a failing work ethic. (429)

In the United States, where the urban-black-underclass thesis originated, research has shown that what is attributed to the so-called underclass – which has generally been identified as urban, black, and poor – is actually representative of behaviours across the class and racial structure. Behaviours such as drug use, divorce, laziness, and empty consumerism exist no less in upper-status neighbourhoods than in inner-city neighbourhoods. According to Reed (1988), "[T]he difference lies not in the behavior but in the social position of those exhibiting it" (190). In fact, some commentators have gone as far as to suggest that support for the underclass thesis amounts to nothing more than a neo-liberal ideological justification for cutbacks to the welfare state (Buckingham 1999). Within an American context, the construction of a black inner-city pathological culture lays the ideological groundwork for a public-policy agenda that endorses workfare, demolition of public housing, and the massive expansion of the police and prison complex (Arena 2005).

While it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a systematic review of this debate, suffice it to say that the media framed Manners's shooting in a fashion that had clear ideological overtones. Because it was framed as a shooting that took place in an already violent, underclass neighbourhood, the death of Jordan Manners was constructed as tragic but not surprising; it was framed as a logical extension of the pre-existing socio-economic and cultural conditions

that had come to define the broader neighbourhood. Toronto's violent underclass had spawned yet another victim.

Alternative frames

Analytically, and as Loseke (2003) argues, dominant frames should be understood in relation to those that are less prominent or those that fail to emerge entirely. Indeed, framing a problem in one way is tantamount to saying the condition is a certain *kind* of problem, and that, by implication, means alternative frameworks are marginalized or excluded (see Best 2008). If Manners's death was ultimately framed as a shooting with its etiological roots in gang violence and social disorganization, what other frames were overlooked? Given how little was known immediately following the shooting, it is interesting that the media did not choose to frame the event in ways that would have resonated more clearly with previous school shootings. In fact, if we compare the media's claims-making techniques after Manners's death to those that have characterized school shootings in the past, important distinctions emerge that tell us a lot about how school shootings in low-income communities are likely to be framed.

As secondary claims makers, experts play a critical role in the process of defining and thus resolving a social problem (Loseke 2003). In the wake of previous school shootings, for example, the media sought expert opinion in order to explain what seemed so difficult to comprehend. According to Lawrence and Birkland (2004), these experts usually point to individual or systemic causal factors, ranging from flawed character, on the one hand, to violent video games, rock, or rap/hip hop music and teen culture, on the other. At the same time, claims that youth in general face an ubiquitous risk of being victimized are often made. For example, in the aftermath of the Columbine shootings, the *Globe and Mail* sought insight from the chief of psychology at Children's Hospital in Denver, Colorado. Paraphrasing the psychologist, the article suggested that the teens

> developed a warped value system that allowed them to believe that what they were doing was right, just like the Nazis did during the Holocaust. "They were, in fact, young Nazis" he said ... The risks, he said, are that others with that same set of values are walking around, holding within themselves the possibility of other horrific acts of annihilation. (*Globe and Mail* 23 April 1999: A17)

However, in the case of Jordan Manners, expert analyses rarely, if ever, appeared in media discourse immediately following the event. The only occasion when expert opinion was consulted involved the interviewing of grief counsellors, where commentary typically focused on how students in a state of shock could best recover from the experience. However, there were no articles where experts were asked to comment on the possible causes of the shooting. In fact, we would argue that the durability of the dominant framework – grounded in pre-existing typologies of violence that conflate stereotypical notions of race (black), gender (male), and socio-economic status (low) – set the stage for a ''common-sense'' explanation that required no further confirmation.

Some of the language used to describe Manners's death is also interesting to note, as it does not coincide with the expressions typically used to describe other school shootings. While the media generally used words such as ''a shooting in a school,'' ''fatal shooting,'' or ''a shooting death'' to describe the event at CWJC, phrases that would perhaps seem too callous if used to describe other school shootings were also used, including ''gunned down,'' ''blown away,'' and ''put a bullet in him.'' (This discourse is even more intriguing given that we still do not know whether the event was the result of an accidental discharge of the firearm). We argue that this discourse is in keeping with the gangster/underclass frame used to describe and explain the shooting's etiology.

A third point that illustrates the contrast between the framing of Manners's death and that of other school shootings is that while Manners was held in high regard as a victim, his death was not constructed as if it symbolically shattered the innocence of youth in general, a common feature of frameworks typically applied to other school shootings (see Newman 2004). Instead, Manners's death was framed as if it were iconic of localized neighbourhood violence. The following passage, taken from a report describing Jordan Manners's funeral, supports this view:

> To his friends and relatives, he was an artistic teenager with a fascination for snakes and pranks, who still sucked his thumb at times—a star that burned out ahead of its time ... But to the hundreds of mourners who knew him little yet showed up to celebrate his memory yesterday, *Jordan Manners became an icon for the damage gun crime has brought to their community.* (*Globe and Mail* 1 June 2007: A14; emphasis added).

To be clear, the article did *not* suggest that Manners's death had come to symbolize the shattering of innocence in general. Rather, it suggested that Manners had become an icon for the damage brought about by gun violence in his community in particular: discursively, the risk of victimization was therefore localized, while the shooting's etiology was made exclusive to his community.

Conclusion

We are not going to conclude this article with suggestions as to how the media should have framed the shooting of Jordan Manners. However, if the media had only reported the "facts" on the day of— and days following—the shooting, it is entirely possible the story would have been seen as less newsworthy: one deceased boy, with no concrete information about a weapon, suspect(s), or motive. We do believe that the existing framing is telling because it is illustrative of essentialized and stereotypical thinking about crime in poor communities inhabited mainly by people of colour. The underclass ideology tends to conceptualize poor black males as a homogenous group and presumes that there can only be a negative response to socio-economic dislocation: crime and violence (see Macdonald and Marsh 2001). The underclass view, which we argue the mainstream media adopted largely because it was in sync with "common-sense" views about "high crime" in inner-city neighbourhoods, fails to appreciate that individuals can react quite differently to apparently similar environments (i.e., living in the Jane and Finch area) and that these reactions are never clear or predictable. This static view of the "underclass culture" which informed media accounts ignores the complex and changing life experiences of people who find themselves living in difficult circumstances.

Additionally, since the "cause" of the shooting was framed in a fashion that was suggestive of social and/or cultural inferiority (single-parent families, unwed mothers, welfare dependency, a high concentration of subsidized housing, etc.), by logical extension, the obvious "solution" to end such gun violence must lie in efforts by those who inhabit such areas to change their attitudes and behaviours (e.g., more respect for and co-operation with authorities such as police and teachers, better parenting, ending "welfare dependency," more "positive" male role models, a better prepared workforce, etc.). One could go as far as to argue that because of the way in which this event was framed by the press, a *dysfunctional local community*

was seen as ostensibly the root cause of Jordan Manners's death. We find it both interesting and disturbing that the widespread societal outrage characteristic of media reports on other school shootings was undetected in our content analysis of this Toronto school shooting. Despite decades of criticism by prominent scholars who argue that descriptions of the poor as being culturally unique have little explanatory power (see Goode and Eames 1996), our research here shows how the concept of a poverty/underclass culture is alive and well in Canadian popular culture.

Thus, we have established the media's important role in framing Jordan Manners's death in a manner consistent with an underclass ideology. While this frame was not monolithic in the sense that issues of gun control did appear at times (particularly in the *Toronto Star*), we do contend that the media and other claims makers ultimately framed the event in terms of the underclass framework because it so easily fit into a pre-existing, taken-for-granted schemata about the Jane and Finch neighbourhood in northwest Toronto. Moreover, the underclass frame never seriously wavered, nor was it ever challenged in the press over the course of a one-year period following the shooting. That said, coming to terms with how Manners's death was framed provides a sobering backdrop and/or corrective that, we would argue, may help to ensure the causes of violence in other poor, racialized Canadian communities are no longer simplistically derived from their reputations as crime "hot spots." Indeed, the efficacy of our social and economic policies and the integrity of our communities are at stake.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Sean Hier, Julian Tanner, Ken Menzies, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

2. We are using the term *underclass* to refer to a welfare-dependent culture that is associated with single parenthood and countercultural values that encourage dependency and criminality.

3. For a detailed typology of school shootings, see Muschert 2007b.

4. For example, prior to the 13 September 2006 shooting at Montreal's Dawson College, Kimveer Gill updated his personal Web page, where he not only voiced his despair about life but

also referred to himself as the ''Angel of Death'' (see CBC News 15 Sept. 2006).

5. Interestingly, Lippman once argued that newspaper reporting is a process of supporting cultural stereotypes with news that is readily available (qtd. in Epstein 1973).

6. The Jane and Finch area of northwest Toronto is a low-income community that has had a reputation for crime and violence since at least the early 1990s.

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