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Moving beyond deficit media figurations of young people: troubling the contemporary 'youth crime crisis'

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ABSTRACT

It is common for the media to cast young people as dangerous and delinquent, particularly when those young people derive from marginalized backgrounds. Moral panics are fuelled and sustained by the media in their role as agents of moral indignation. Additionally, the media represent a powerful source of moral regulation, often working against the interests of young people. In this paper, a recent media focus on the 'youth crime crisis' in Queensland, Australia is examined to consider potential ways in which public discourse might move beyond deficit tropes to develop more nuanced and productive conceptualizations of youth. We draw on emergent theorizations of the 'figurations' that define the ways in which 'youth' is understood in public discourse to consider how mediated social imaginaries work to produce representations of young people and frame possibilities for thinking about their place in contemporary society.

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Introduction

Wielding substantial discursive power, major news media regularly and systematically construct powerful imaginaries of youth, which feed into the broader cultural politics of the day. News media actively mediate and re-present reality (Buckingham 2019) through discursive systems of social and cultural meaning, which are value-laden and imbued with ideology (Hall 1997). In doing so, major news media act as influential agents of *moral indignation* (Cohen 1987) in service of specific political, economic and social ends that work to further marginalize and disenfranchise youth. As Hickey-Moody (2013) has argued, it is important to consider this 'mediating' effect of the media because it 'constitutes part of the hegemonic nature of panic discourses. Media is ubiquitous in everyday life, and so are panic discourses about select demographics of youth' (45).

This paper examines how selective representations of youth, cast within mainstream media sources, have functioned to inform a moral panic on youth crime currently

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reported in Queensland, Australia. Demonstrating the discursive power of mainstream media in constructing and maintaining particular 'figures' of youth (Threadgold 2020), the representations cast in reports from this crime crisis have prefigured 'youth' as a primary point of demarcation to demonstrate how ideological overlays of meaning work within and through media reporting.

Young people live within increasingly complex social contexts, which Giroux (2015) has described as creating a 'temporality that resembles dead time marked by a loss of faith in progress along with the emergence of apocalyptic narratives in which the future appears indeterminate, bleak, and insecure' (224). While there are serious crises facing youth (Riddle 2022), we take a somewhat more optimistic view of the possibilities for building more democratic, sustainable and inclusive futures that place young people at the heart of communities through renderings of regionality, spatiality and the development of more complex understandings of the experiences of young people (Farrugia 2020). Examining how dominant representations of young people circulate to inform popular sentiment is a vital component in this undertaking, with the interrogation of media representations of young people especially important.

In this paper, we draw upon emergent theorizations of *figurations of youth* (e.g. Kelly 2013; Threadgold 2020) in response to deficit views of youth as represented in a selection of mainstream media sources. Following Threadgold (2020), we contend that a range of selective and narrowly constituted 'figures' of youth provide a 'figurative heuristic' (690) that orients powerful allegorical representations of young people, and shapes the symbolic outlines and social forms that young people are expected to fulfil. We contend that these figures of youth work as conceptual 'containers' that provide rhetorical form to media representations, and which function to frame public sentiment and shape the social imaginary. Threadgold (2020) suggested that 'figurative representations are necessarily partial, fleeting and open to renegotiation. But some figures are more problematic than others' (697). While we agree that figurations of young people are open to renegotiation, our concern is that the most compelling and dominant figurations feed into deficit discourses of youth; namely, where young people are viewed as deviant and dangerous.

To further nuance our argument and geographically situate the analysis we offer in the latter sections of this paper, we draw attention to the ways in which defined figurations of youth come to be represented within regional settings – locations outside of the urban metropole. Given the vastness of the Australian landmass, regional, rural and remote communities represent significant locations that 'are vital to the economy, have considerable political power, and are an enduring dimension of the national imaginary' (Harris and Idriss 2021, 80). Particular idealizations of the 'regional' and 'youth' exist in the public imaginary, but we take up Cuervo and Wyn's (2012) call to understand the fluidity and constant negotiation of youth identities and transitions in Australia's non-metropolitan settings. Following Cuervo and Wyn (2012), we seek to understand how the dominant figurations circulating within a particular milieu – in this case, regional Queensland – generate particular figurations of the young person as integrally associated with the regional context. While young people living in the regions are affected by globalized economic and social rationalities that have their foundation in wider *global* networks and flows, there are distinctly spatialized aspects to the experiences and temporalities of regional youth (Farrugia 2014) that frame how young people navigate and negotiate

the tensions inherent to these milieu and the forces that impinge on these 'local' settings (Harris and Idriss 2021).

We suggest that understanding the role of media figurations of youth is central to the development of more nuanced understandings of young peoples' positionalities, and where the media exerts a 'translative' effect by both bringing-in and mediating-out images of youth and who young people *are*. More complex explorations of the lives that young people lead outside of the metropole provide an especially significant opportunity to consider how mediations of the idea of the 'young person' flow into and from 'local' contexts (Farrugia 2020).

Moral panics and media figurations of youth

Cohen (1987) described moral panic as emblematic of 'a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people' (9). While there are several agents at work in the production of moral panic, the mass media play a central role (Critcher 2015) as key mediators. As such, it is important to understand how the media work to create, sustain and extend figurations of youth as deviant and delinquent 'folk devils' through moral panic (Cohen 1987).

First, the mass media frame coded images of deviance, through which the threat presented by enactments of deviance become exaggerated and the actions and behaviours of deviant actors emphasized to generate moral outrage. Actors associated with these behaviours are identified according to what Cohen (1987) terms the *orientations*, *images* and *causation* that associate with the deviant actions. In drawing attention to these actions, and speculating on the motivations underpinning these enactments, the media primes the public for panic, setting the scene for 'moral entrepreneurs' and other political actors to steer the narrative; typically towards coercive forms of control and regulation.

We note that Threadgold's (2020) theorization of 'figures' of youth provides a useful conceptual lens for considering how 'youth moral panics distort, misrepresent and pathologise the lives of young people' (697). As Giroux (2009, 2015) has argued, youth face increasingly hostile treatment within neoliberal socioeconomic contexts. It occurs that the hollowing out of the welfare state has resulted in a highly politicized and policed 'culture of violence, cruelty and disposability' (Giroux 2015, 226) towards youth. Within this context, the media work deliberately and systematically to 'habitually reinforce the public perception of young people as variously lazy, stupid, self-indulgent, volatile, dangerous, and manipulative' (Giroux 2009, 14). The formation of this specific 'figure' of youth mediates a conceptual frame for assessing young people and their place in society.

We contend that the figuration of young people by the media in this present moment extends the five elements of moral panic proposed by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994): *concern*, *hostility*, *consensus*, *disproportionality* and *volatility*. Concern is demonstrated through a systematic campaign of media attention, which produces a 'heightened level of concern over the behaviour of a certain group or category' (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994, 33). Hostility is overtly shown towards youth who are perceived as dangerous and deserving of punitive treatment. Consensus is mediated as attempts towards general agreement among the 'ordinary' citizenry confirms that the threat is 'real' and deserving

of public interest. Disproportionality is evidenced in which 'public concern is in excess of what is appropriate if concern were directly proportional to objective harm' (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994, 36). Finally, volatility is demonstrated through the fleeting and cyclical nature of moral panic, in which concerns subside or flare up further, but in different quarters and in nuanced forms.

Hier (2019) argued that moral panics have become routine expressions of collective grievance, which have arisen through 'perceived crises in the moral regulation of everyday life' (880). Importantly for this paper, moral panics work to shape the moral regulation of social expectations and behaviours by legitimizing and making common-sense value propositions regarding young people, their worth and role in society. Leaving aside the systemic and structural inequalities, marginalization and deprivation faced by many young people, moral panic regarding youth recasts the problem as one of individuated responsibilisation, through which youth are implicated within their situation – 'when structural disadvantages are morphed into individual deficits and pathologies' (Threadgold 2020, 696). In this way, the moral regulation of moral panics proceed via 'dialectical judgements about proper and improper ways of thinking and acting that express the norms of intelligibility associated with different regimes of social discipline' (Hier 2019, 883). The key point here is that there is a *concerted* effort on the part of media and political actors to shape a meta-narrative; one which anticipates political, social and economic effects (Critcher 2015, 2017).

While there have been various critiques of the salience of moral panic as a concept for understanding social phenomena (e.g. Falkof 2020; Horsely 2017; Thompson and Williams 2015), we contend that it is useful to examine the discursive interplay between media, moral entrepreneurs, control culture and the public. Critcher (2017) argued that Cohen (1987) provided a *processual* model of moral panic – in which the media follow a process of exaggeration, distortion and symbolization – whereas Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) provided an *attributional* model of moral panic – which seeks to understand which claims are being made, by whom and for which purposes. In this paper, we combine the two as an analytic frame to understand both the process and attributes of the present moral panic regarding youth in Queensland.

Moral panics and youth in Australia

Young people are neither represented fairly nor equitably in Australian news media (Notley and Dezuanni 2023). There is a long history of treating young people as either 'at risk' or as delinquents (Hickey and Pauli-Myler 2019). This dualism calls to view an intent to position young people as either hapless victims or dangerous deviants, with each position relegating young people to a positionality requiring oversight and control (Kelly 2001). Australia has a substantial history of media and public discourse generating representations of youth as either passive victim *or* dangerous delinquents, with this further exacerbated within racialized figurations (Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021; Lee et al. 2022).

For example, media-generated moral panics have historically centred on First Nations, Vietnamese – Australian, Lebanese – Australian and Sudanese – Australian youth (e.g. Hickey-Moody 2013; MacDonald 2017; Molla 2021; Noble and Poynting 2003; Poynting, Tabar, and Noble 2005; Weng and Mansouri 2021). A recent moral panic regarding 'African gangs' occupied a central position in mainstream news reporting between 2015 and 2018

(Elias, Mansouri, and Paradies 2021; Macaulay and Deppeler 2020; Molla 2021). The persistent negative media attention has had serious consequences for the wellbeing and social belonging of these young people (Macaulay and Deppeler 2020). Additionally, the media discourse in Australia explicitly works to further marginalize and socially exclude youth from refugee backgrounds (MacDonald 2017). The success of the media in establishing 'African gangs' as a discursive trope ensured that it became 'a convenient catchphrase to meld race and crime and has been invoked, sustained and affirmed through media and political repertoires' (Weng and Mansouri 2021, 470).

Media figurations of Queensland youth as dangerous and delinquent

For this paper, we focus on headlines and content from online news articles, editorial and opinion pieces in considering how recent media representations of youth in Queensland, Australia have worked to frame the current 'youth crime crisis' as a moral panic. While there are also positive representations of youth provided in the media, we have focussed on the construct of the 'dangerous and delinquent youth' expressly in our analysis and as a lens to consider the youth crime crisis. It is also important to note that headlines are illustrative of the general tendency in media discourses to universalize perspectives and represent complex issues as being straightforward, common-sense and unproblematic. On this we note that the attention given to the youth crime crisis amplifies a specific rendering of youth, and although more 'positive' stories of young people may also have been covered in the time period of our analysis, it occurs that negative and sensationalist reports dominated: young people as out-of-control and dangerous provided a central trope in the reporting during this period. As Fairclough (1993) argued, the myth of universalized perspective 'underpins the ideological work of the media: offering images of and categories for reality, positioning and shaping social subjects, and contributing for the most part to social control and reproduction' (161). The representations of young people we noted functioned according to this universalist tonality, mediating discourses that characterized young people in predominantly derogatory terms (Hickey-Moody 2013).

We render our analysis via a purposive sample of articles from online 'print' news media in Queensland collected through the first quarter of 2023, and in context of the 'youth crime crisis' apparent at this time. Drawing on a discourse analysis (Fairclough 1993, 2001; Wodak 2001, 2015) and web-based sentiment and AI-supported content analysis to consider how figurations of youth are established through the framing of moral panic, we focussed our analysis on defining the rhetorical tropes used in the description and naming of young people and the characteristics, values and attributes assigned to these actors. In taking this approach, we were particularly interested in defining how media figurations of youth work to 'position' different demographic groups (in this case, young people) in relation to wider societal and community sentiment. This focus offered a means to consider how representations inform and shape the social imaginary, and feed into the 'relationship of social practice to power relations' (Fairclough 1993, 226).

Headlines

We chose to use online news media reports that focused on youth crime in Queensland published between 1 January 2023–31 March 2023. This date range was selected for two

key reasons: first, to ensure that the dataset was focused and manageable; and second, because there was an evident spike of interest during that time, following the emergence of a series of high-profile assaults and robberies perpetuated by young people. This is evidenced in Figure 1, which illustrates interest over the past 5 years among Google users from Queensland searching for 'youth crime' (Google Trends—https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2018-04-011April2018%202023-03-31&geo=AU-QLD&q=youth%20crime).

Following the confirmation of this date range, a search was undertaken for news articles published online during that period, which had an explicit focus on youth crime in Queensland. The *Google News* search function was used, along with search queries on key news websites, including *ABC News*, the *Courier Mail* and other News Corp outlets, the *Guardian* and the *Brisbane Times*. A total of 173 unique articles were published online during the period, which directly referenced youth crime in Queensland. Duplicate, republished or syndicated items were not included, along with any references to youth crime that were included in general news bulletins and updates. Figure 2 provides the number of articles published each day between January and March 2023, which demonstrates that there was an observable peak in media interest during the second half of February 2023.

SpeakAI (https://speakai.co/) was used to generate a sentiment analysis of the 173 headlines. The overall sentiment was overwhelmingly negative (81.03%), given the strong focus on issues related to youth crime, violence and the (perceived) failure of the youth justice system. According to SpeakAI, there were much lower neutral (7.47%) and positive (11.49%) sentiments expressed in the selected corpus of news headlines.

Our content analysis found that the 173 selected headlines provided clear demonstrations of Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) elements of moral panic:

- *Concern* through the urgency of calls for changing youth justice laws and the creation of a sense of widespread panic. Indicative headlines include 'Knives out: Families broken, suburbs in fear as youths go armed' (Read 2023) and 'Time for State Government to step up on youth crime' (Landry 2023).

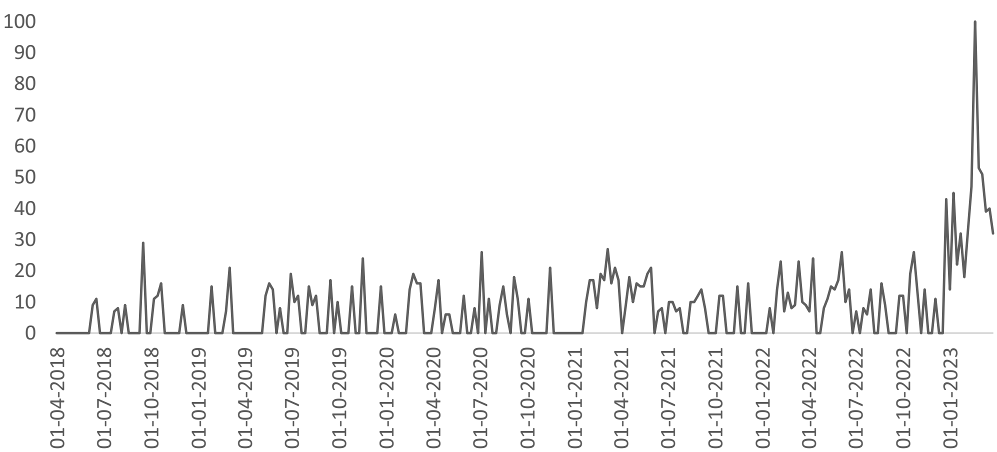

Figure 1. Google trends interest over time for 'youth crime' in Queensland.

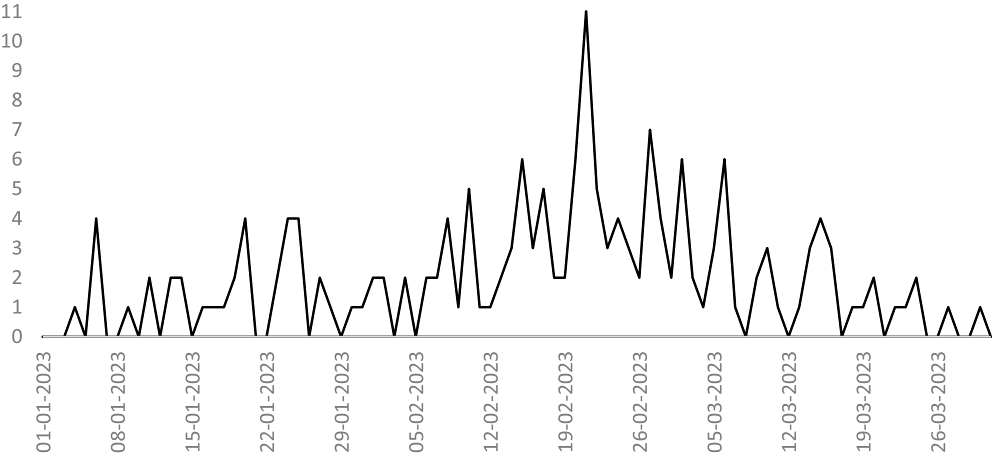

Figure 2. News articles on Queensland youth crime (1 January – 31 March 2023).

- *Hostility* through deliberate language choices to describe incidents of crime and actors. Examples include 'hardcore offender' (McCormack 2023), 'horrifying moment' and 'ruthless youths' (Talintyre 2023), 'young thugs' (The Courier Mail 2023b), 'teenage menaces' (Bulloch 2023) and 'kid perps' (Bennett 2023).
- *Consensus* via concerted attempts to build a call to action through the use of experts, authorities and implied agreement on issues. Example headlines include 'Massive cost of Gold Coast's youth crime nightmare' (Woods 2023) and 'Queensland's new major crackdown on youth crime' (Ferri 2023).
- *Disproportionality* through the focus on exceptional incidents of crime and hyperactive focus on increasing alarm of cases involving youth. Indicative headlines include 'Horrifying moment a woman is RUN OVER by her own car after it was stolen by a gang of ruthless youths – with crime wave spiralling out of control' (Talintyre 2023) and 'Twisted world where innocent locked up while guilty walk free' (Lang 2023).
- *Volatility* being demonstrated by descriptions of rapidly changing and chaotic nature of youth crime. This sentiment was carried in statements including 'youth crime surge' (McCormack 2023), 'the system's broken' (Gillespie 2023) and 'crime spike' (Utting 2023).

News media reports

Further discursive analysis of the content of the selected news reports yielded important insights into the production of cultural relationships and social practices through the figuration of youth as dangerous and deviant. Illustrative examples demonstrate the important link between power relations and social practices in the rendering of social imaginaries by the media (Fairclough 1993).

It is difficult to ignore the affective power of media reporting that details 'harrowing stories of pensioners being mugged at ATMs, youths roaming the streets with machetes and children now too scared to leave home' (Utting 2023, np). However,

we suggest that examples of this type present as well-worn tropes; tropes that are intended to paint youth as folk devils (Cohen 1987), but which remain two-dimensional and lack nuance. We argue that the more significant representations of young people as dangerous and delinquent focus on generating concern (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994) through appealing to fear and irrationality. The following example provides insight into the discursive framing:

> We simply cannot, as a civilised community, stand by and allow fashionable ideology inside criminology faculties to allow violent individuals to roam through our communities and threaten lives. . . . Queenslanders are becoming frightened in their own homes, some openly wondering whether it is best to leave the car keys on a kitchen bench rather than hiding them away and risk angry youth rampaging through their house and attacking the occupants in their attempt to steal the family car. (The Courier Mail 2023a, np)

The work of building moral indignation (Critcher 2015) runs through reports of this type, where the deliberate attempt to generate consensus (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994) establishes clear parameters for collective grievance (Hier 2019). Articles announcing that 'this could have been you, this could have been your mother or father or any one of us going about our day' (Philp 2023, np) call the reader to position themselves *within* the crisis. Similarly, moves to amplify concern and anxiety by describing 'property lost. Residents struggling to sleep. Families living in fear. These are the ongoing consequences of a city gripped by a youth crime wave' (Hunter and Nolan 2023, np) indicate the shared union that comes in being implicated in this crisis. There is even direct reference to the sense of a moral panic, albeit in the negative when victims – ordinary members of community – are hailed into action: 'youth crime is no urban myth, nor a media generated community panic. It's now factored into our ordinary lives' (The Sunday Mail 2023, np). As such, calls for urgent action present as a logical response, and in which the government is exhorted to 'step up and do something, anything, to protect the community and make people feel safe again' (Landry 2023, np).

A sense of widespread concern and panic is created through the news media reporting, in which 'victims families are calling for changes to legislation and the court system. Some vigilantes are taking matters into their own hands. Residents in upmarket Brisbane suburbs have pooled money for private street security' (Read 2023, np). Such accounts of first-hand experiences of crime control, including vigilantism, provide a common theme in reports and serve as recognizable and relatable forms of authoritative knowledge and immediacy of experience (Higgins 2022). Of course, such authoritative voices of first-hand experience are given to carefully managed accounts from individuals who fulfil the role of 'victim' or 'concerned citizen'. Noticeably absent are the voices of youth; an oversight that indicates the power of manipulative silence in media representations (McLaren and Patil 2016) and which strategically manoeuvres public sentiment towards the characterizations of youth as dangerous and delinquent. Giving voice to youth would run counter to these ends because they are not a legitimate 'community' to be heard:

> Queensland's youth crime crisis is at boiling point. . . . Despite the shrill calls of panic from the progressive elements in our society, few youth offenders get sent to jail. . . . The community is right to be angry. The government must listen to the people and take appropriate action to address this crisis. Community safety must come first. (Goldsworthy 2023, np)

> A group of 30 hardcore teenage offenders menace the Mount Isa community day and night, and cops know them all by name. Residents of the once great outback town live paralysed by fear, too scared to leave their home, walk to their car alone, or even drive at night as youth crime holds them hostage in their own town. Youths have taken over a hill in town—now dubbed 'Rexona Hill'—dedicated to dangerous chroming, and many live in complete poverty in a suburb people have labelled 'The Bronx'. (Bulloch 2023, np)

Such accounts provide a clear positioning of young people as folk devils, acting out with negative agency (Cohen 1987) by causing harm and destruction. Leaving aside the casual racism of the extract above, the offhand reference to the systemic and structural impoverishment of the young people in question does little to consider how youth are made hyper vulnerable to a political, social and economic climate that is unsympathetic to their plight. Instead, arguments such as the following emerge, pitched directly to generate concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994):

> Youth crime is raging like there's no tomorrow. . . . They are let off and let out, while the rest of us are sitting ducks, waiting for them to strike. Good people are holed up in their homes. Women, in particular, are frightened about what might happen if they dare to go outside. A hapless public, furious at the lack of government muscle, is leaning towards vigilantism. (Lang 2023, np)

It seems hardly surprising then that there is a growing acceptance of vigilantism that arises within the coverage, with a notable example including a situation in which 'a furious Queensland father has scared off a gang of car thieves by bellowing at them in remarkable security footage, as he warned neighbourhoods are ready to go to war with youth criminals' (Vincent 2023, np). The warning is made clear, that 'angry words from politicians are not enough. There needs to be more serious action taken. Before the cost being paid becomes too high to bear' (Woods 2023, np). Indeed, the collective grievance (Hier 2019) being encouraged by the moral indignation of key political and media agents all but ensure that public sentiment leans in favour of harsher treatment of youth crime and less attention is given to the causes and broader social contexts of the antisocial behaviours of youth who are engaging in dangerous and criminal behaviours.

Overwhelmingly, the 173 selected articles published between 1 January and 31 March 2023 took the stance that not enough was being done to repress and punish, with scant attention given to dissenting and alternative perspectives. Importantly, the voices of youth who are caught up in the youth justice system were absent from the coverage, and indeed, the voices of youth in general were largely unheard.

The excerpts from the selected news media reports above highlight how the media, politicians and other moral entrepreneurs work to generate a sense of moral indignation and collective grievance in service of political and economic ends. The sustained campaign to generate figurations of youth as dangerous and delinquent involved the use of affective and effective 'rhetorical devices to obfuscate social and economic problems' (Threadgold 2020, 687). In other words, it is much easier to blame youth for antisocial and criminal activities than it is to address the deep-seated underlying systemic and structural issues of socioeconomic disadvantage, intergenerational trauma and the ongoing effects of settler-colonialism in Australia.

Conclusion

The construction of the present 'youth crime crisis' follows predictable processes and is formed by clear attributes of moral panic (Cohen 1987; Critcher 2017; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994), through which figurations of young people are distorted, misrepresented and pathologised (Threadgold 2020). These figurations generate anxiety regarding youth and crime, which are neither politically, morally nor value-neutral in their intent and outcome (Lee et al. 2022). Understanding that such figurations of youth have metaphorical and allegorical power, we contend that there needs to be concerted efforts to engage with young people to develop new social imaginaries, which produce more nuanced figurations of youth.

The creation of moral panics regarding youth does little to address the material, social and cultural deprivation experienced by many young people, and instead run the risk of entrenching indifference and disrespect towards youth (Giroux 2009). An outcome of this situation is the further alienation and disenfranchisement of youth from their communities:

> Deprivations associated with marginalisation extend from the material to the ontological. Young people who are unable to get work can become disengaged from the communities in which they live. They may also lose connections with their community and find themselves excluded from the structures and workings of public life. (Walsh and Black 2015, 75)

While media figurations of youth can work towards ends of 'cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect', they can also provide important 'shared resources for struggles of recognition' (Dreher 2009, 454). Thankfully, 'the dependability of law-and-order politics as a political organising strategy is no longer guaranteed' (Lee et al. 2022, 1285), so the efficacy of media figurations of youth as dangerous and delinquent might perhaps not lead to widespread moral panic among communities. However, neither does this mean that more nuanced figurations of youth might become part of the mediatized social imaginary without sustained pressure for mainstream news media organizations to shift their political and economic strategies, in which youth are either commodified or vilified.

In this paper, we have drawn from the nascent literature on figurations of youth, particularly the work of Kelly (2013) and Threadgold (2020) to interrogate how such representations are used as a heuristic by the media to help feed a sense of moral panic around youth crime and crisis. The use of figurations as conceptual containers provides compelling symbolic figures of youth that are highly problematic (Threadgold 2020), yet left unquestioned by the media and other powerful actors.

We suggest that there is conceptual utility in how the 'figuration' of young people allows scope to reconsider the ways in which representations of youth inform the public imaginary. When conflated with crime, figurations that associate young people with deviance and delinquency work to render narrow understandings of who young people are, which in turn pre-empt social responses that reinforce the figuration. When the figure of the young person is cast in such limited, and pathologised terms, it follows that public sentiment towards young people is emerges in commensurate terms. What is missing from the accounts that have dominated the coverage of this crisis that are more nuanced understandings of the complexities that are encountered by young people, and the challenges that affect why some young people engage in anti-social and criminal activity.

We agree that there is a need for a more *relational* sociology of youth, which considers 'the idea of youth as a relational concept linked to social, economic, political, cultural and ecological currents' (Cuervo and Wyn 2014, 907). There is a need to pay close 'attention to young people beyond the global city' to 'understand new positions of marginality and privilege taking place through the contemporary imperatives for mobility, cosmopolitanism, and place attachment' (Farrugia 2020, 238). This will involve moving beyond accounts of young people that typically position young people as 'subjects of formative preparation – as recipients of modes of instruction, discipline and socialisation' (Hickey and Pauli-Myler 2019, 374). Additionally, such work seeks to offset moral panics regarding youth by capturing and sharing counter-narratives that build community cohesion and collective efficacy (Lee, Halsey, and Flynn 2021).

To close, we return to Hall's, 1997 conceptualization of the ways in which cultural meaning is applied to categories such as 'youth' to highlight the social politics that mediate how young people are recognized and understood as a social category. The politics that frame this determination of the young person require scrutiny, with the representation of young people in the media one such site for (critical) attention. Communities have a responsibility to commit to the questioning of the social politics that frame meaning and understanding, and to listen to the voices and experiences of youth so that more nuanced figurations of young people might be made possible. As this paper has argued, to not attend to this responsibility is to risk being caught up in the moment of a media-fuelled moral panic.

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