'Rise of Ram Raiders':

A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis Exploring Media Representations of Collective Youth Crime in New Zealand Media, 2019-2023.

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Abstract

Over the past several years, there has been media commotion about the term *ram raids* and the escalation it has brought to youth crimes. Whilst there have been media claims towards increasing youth crime numbers and speculation from mainstream media about *ram raiders'* involvement in crime; the statistical evidence seems to state otherwise. The media is a powerful institution that can lead to constructing discourses that can influence the attitudes of the general public and in turn lead to various policy changes. Ram raiders are presented in the media through predominantly negative narratives and have increased discussions in regard to controlling the youth from ram-raiding behaviour. There currently is no research that directly examines the discourses of youth ram raiders in New Zealand media. Therefore, this thesis will use a Foucauldian discursive approach to analyse the representation of the term ram raiders in newspaper articles in New Zealand media, and the consequences that arise as a result of such discourses. The results showed that there were three discourses identified: the *criminal* discourse, the *outsiders* discourse, and the *moral panic* discourse, alongside a competing discourse of youth as *victims*. The *criminal* discourse was identified as the dominant discourse which emphasises youth committing ram raids as an individualised issue. The *outsiders* discourse was supported by the criminal discourse and linked ram raiders to gang members and ethnic minorities further creating an *us* vs *them* rhetoric. *Moral panic* was a discourse that emphasised the power held by the media as the publications reached an extensive audience presenting ram raiders as criminals and outsiders creating a moral panic in public. A competing discourse was identified with ram raiders being presented as the *victims* shown to be a necessary addition to the conversation. It provided an alternative perspective that challenged the dominant discourse to allow for a well-rounded representation of the ram raiders. Further discursive practices represented the positionality of public and political figures leading to the punishment of young people participating in ram raids.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"8 youths as young as 13 arrested amid Auckland ram-raids" (1 News, 2023, para. 1),

Young offenders are a topical source of concern and have been for many years. In recent years, there has been an emergence of a subtype of predominantly youth offending: so-called *ram raids*. However, there is little known about this term as definitions are defined through popular media or operational frameworks such as police. Yet, this specific form of youth crime is informing public discussion and policy responses resulting in recent legislation defining ram raiding acts in the New Zealand legal system. Therefore, this study will examine media representations of *ram raiders* and how these discursive formations inform social responses.

News article titles regarding youth and the so-called ram raids phenomena have become a focal point in discussions about crime and justice in New Zealand recently. There has been ever-growing concern about whether this behaviour can be linked to increasing criminal activity. In this thesis, I explore the statistical evidence concerning media claims and the academic literature that may have contributed to the media representation of ram raiders through news articles in New Zealand.

The term *ram raids* has been defined by the New Zealand Police (2023) as incidents that include burglaries or intent of burglary through the use of a vehicle (p. 2). The New Zealand Police report compiled a year's worth of data on 283 ram raids that had occurred, with an increase of 167% in ram raids since 2016 (Chambers, 2022). The information stated that 59% of the individuals involved in the ram raids were aged between 14 to 17 years old with 17 percent under the age of 13. Even though there seems to be a significant increase in such crimes being carried out by the youth of New Zealand, there are very few studies that have provided input on the events.

However, the media actively reported these incidents with recent reports (Hendry, 2023, para. 1; Feek, 2023, para. 14; Cheng, 2023, para. 1; van Velden, 2023) portraying the ram raids as

causing a threat to societal values (Cohen, 1972) through the positioning of political leaders and the general public. The intense reporting of ram raids raises questions as to how these incidents differ from common youth offending, how these individuals are portrayed in the New Zealand media, and how these representations contribute to broader public perceptions of the perpetrators of these offences.

To address these questions, my study will use a Foucauldian discourse analysis approach to examine relevant newspaper articles in the media to highlight discourses associated with the term ram raids/raiders. The discursive practices will identify the media representations of youth ram raiders and how they can lead to consequences for young people participating in ram raids.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

To discuss the recent media perspective of youth ram raiders, this chapter will be divided into three sections for the main components of the current study. The first section establishes what the term youth refers to and their role in crime. The section further presents international and local research to describe the landscape of youth crime globally and within New Zealand, following factors that lead to youth crime and types of youth offending. The second section defines ram raids and their current presence in New Zealand is explored. Research methods employed by previous studies that have been completed on ram raids will be presented to set the foundations of the method chapter of this thesis. The third section discusses the notion of media as an institution and its representation of ram raiders. Further concepts such as moral panic, racial underpinnings, and outgroups, as a result of media discourses are analysed. The chapter concludes with an emphasis on the social changes this study can inform and highlights the premise of the current thesis.

What does the term *Youth* mean?

"Youth is just a word" (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 94). A word that is commonly referred to as a stage in the life course of 1.2 billion young people (Lore, 2020). This section will identify the definition of youth and their representation in society which will be referred to throughout this study.

Traditionally, youth have been defined through their age, with the United Nations identifying youth between the ages of 15 to 24 years old (Minde et al., 2018). Age divisions become a reminder of the power relations that are held between young and old. With older age groups controlling institutions that construct the identity of youth (Jones, 2009).

Youth as a concept is transitioning to be understood as an intricate layer of values reflected by political and social concepts (Jones, 2009; Kehily, 2013). In recent years the term youth has become a socially constructed concept malleable to society's constantly changing practices and

values (White, Wyn & Robard, 2017). The term often harbours both positive and negative stereotypes of either youth possessing energy towards a successful future or presenting a threat to the security of society (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). These associations whether positive or negative are dependent on the behaviour displayed by youth to society's rules. Youth who participate in risk-taking behaviour and do not adhere to the social contract by disregarding laws, begin to accumulate negative reactions towards their identity which can affect the narrative of youth overall.

This thesis will primarily take into account the age definitions and discursive constructions of youth. The term youth will be used when referring to children and adolescents and will further identify the role of youth in subcategories of young individuals partaking in criminal acts when describing ram raiders.

Youth Crime

Youth engaging in crime becomes a subgroup of children that are participating in socially unacceptable behaviour. Tanner (1996, p. 1) describes youth crime in *Responding to Youth Crime in Canada* as “No other social group receives as much negative attention as the young; they are viewed variously as troubling and troubled, a constant source of fear and worry” (Cesaroni & Doob, 2020, p. 7). To provide a broad perspective on youth crime, this section will explore the global legal definitions of juvenile delinquency, the age of criminal responsibility, and the changing justice system approaches to youth crime.

Youth crime is measured around the world and is dependent on how *youth* and *crime* are defined and subject to legal proceedings of the state. With youth being a changing concept universally, age becomes a general definition for the term. Whereas, crime is defined through legislative and political procedures that are formed through societal values to upkeep the social contract of participants. Crime occurs when an intentional act violates the criminal law by breaching its parameters set out by the state (Bučar Ručman, 2019). Therefore, youth crime refers to juvenile

delinquency where a child is labelled a delinquent by the judicial system as a result of breaking the law by partaking in criminal acts (Tappan, 1949; Young et al., 2017).

Juvenile delinquency is measured in countries for children that are under the age of 18 years old (Young et al., 2017). The age of criminal responsibility dictates when youth can be held accountable for their delinquent behaviour leading to criminal activity (Hartjen, 2008). The juvenile justice system in each country consists of processes that will allow the youth to take accountability for their actions and then be provided with a suitable punishment for their due crime (Dilawar, 2024; Malvaso et al., 2024). This age varies globally with most continents showing a range from 7 to 18 years old as shown in Table 1 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006). Table 1 shows that the age of criminal responsibility can begin as early as seven years old when children can be prosecuted for disregarding laws and infringing on prohibited acts.

Table 1

The Age range of Criminal Responsibility for Young People Across Continents

Continent	Age range (years)
Africa	7 to 16
Americas	7 to 18
Asia	7 to 16
Europe	8 to 17
Oceania	7 to 10

Note. The data is collected from the Child Rights International Network (CRIN, n.d.)

The number of continents that have children being liable to legal reprimand shows an alignment with the criminal justice system rather than the welfare approach. The welfare approach focused on children being removed from the custody of their parental figures and placed under state care rather than criminal sentences (Cipriani, 2016). It is argued that by distancing from the welfare approach, children can take responsibility for their actions and face the consequences associated with the legal system (Cipriani, 2016). However, in shifting focus towards the legal system, children

who come from impoverished backgrounds are not being provided with the same benefits and resources to rectify and understand their actions that children from wealthier backgrounds may receive (Goldson, 2013). Systemic factors that affect children involved in criminal acts are explored further in the section to advise how inequalities can contribute to youth offending. Research has shown that placing children in confinement does not reduce delinquent behaviour, but rather increases the chances of reconviction, violent tendencies, reduces chances of future employment, and tethers family relationships (Scraton, 2004; Richman, 2024). Ultimately, the juvenile justice system officially determines youth who are considered offenders (Cunneen et al., 2015).

The power structures that determine the age of criminal responsibility and judicial systems define children that can be persecuted for criminal acts. They are influenced through public concern and representation of issues facing the state from everyday discourses. Visible discourses highlight the structures contributing to the global statistical trends and presenting the current landscape of youth crime.

Overview of Youth Crime Globally

Although the criminal justice approach seems to provide more punitive barriers towards youth offenders (Cipriani, 2016), the global statistics show evidence of decreasing youth crime rates in the last decade (United Nations, 2023; Polglase & Lambie, 2023). The decreasing youth crime trends are analysed in this section by comparing the data collected over the past four decades to conceptualise the shift.

Official crime statistics show that youth crime rates increased in nine countries in Europe by 50% between the years of 1986 and 1995 within the age groups of 14 to 17-year-olds (Enzmann & Podana, 2010). Similarly, youth crime in the United States between the 1980s and 1990s showed an increase in youth criminal activity related to homicides and violence (Young et al., 2017). The same patterns were mirrored in other countries such as the United Kingdom as their youth offending rates

also increased in the 1980s and 1990s but seem to be gradually improving in the past few years (Jones & Pitts, 1997; Young et al., 2017).

The trends of youth crime in the 1980s and 1990s seemed to continue in the 2000s and 2010s as shown in Table 2. The table presents data collected by the United Nations (2023) showing a decrease in juveniles that are under the age of 18 years old held in custody from 2011 to 2021. Data presents numbers that vary vastly from 2011 to 2021, with a large decrease in most regions except for Oceania having an increase in youth incarceration (United Nations, 2023). It is important to consider other factors such as the financial crisis in 2011 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, which may have contributed to the high incarceration numbers of youth committing crimes. The progression of legal systems within 10 years may also be considered when reviewing the numbers below. Comparably, the continents with a wider range of ages of responsibility in Table 1 have had a higher number of incarcerated youth as shown in Table 2, highlighting accountability on youth from a younger age for criminal acts can result in higher institutional remand.

Table 2

Young People held in Prisons, Penal Institutions or Correctional Institutions by Continent per 100,000 of the Average Regional Rate for Children under 18 Years Old

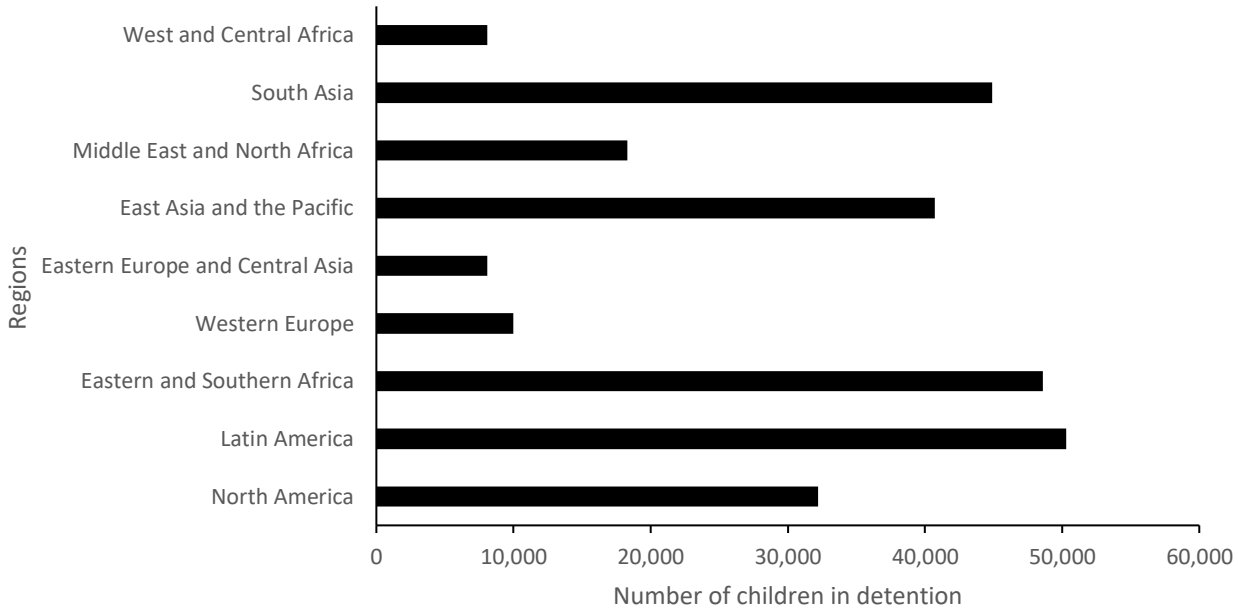
	Youth incarcerated per 100,000 of the average regional rate	
Continents	2011	2021
Africa	5,043	3,373
Latin/Northern America	48,239	11,657
Asia	21,649	5,056
Europe	20,135	5,726
Oceania	59	1,115
Total	74,146	26,927

Note. The data is collected from the annual United Nations Crime Trends Survey (United Nations, 2023)

The data shows that despite various factors contributing to the number of youth being incarcerated such as changing judicial policies and environmental factors; the overall consensus in Table 2 depicts that there has been a decrease in youth prison populations from 2011 to 2021. The researcher notes that these numbers show incarceration rates and are not representative of the youth that are held in detention which includes police custody, pre-trial, or awaiting sentencing. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2021) estimates a global total of 261,200 children aged 0 to 17 years old are currently being held in detention. Figure 1 highlights the data from 202 countries that have been divided into various regions to present that Latin America has the highest number of children in detention of 50,300, closely followed by Eastern and Southern Africa at 48,600. While Eastern Europe/Central Asia and West/Central Africa have the lowest number of children in detention at 8,100. Numbers for previous years' detention of children committing offences were unable to be obtained to provide a comparison.

Figure 1

Number of Children in Detention per 100,000 Population by Region in 2020



Note. This data has been derived from the United Nations Children's Fund (2021)

It is acknowledged that each country has their legal proceedings to incarcerate and detain youth based on their crime. Additionally, social factors such as the development of the nation, cultural beliefs, and ethnic make-up vary across countries and may contribute to youth incarceration and detention rates. However, with the data available, globally it appears that when trends are compared over the past decades, there has been a decrease in youth incarceration numbers. The number of children in detention does cause reason to doubt the trends as a comparison was unable to be completed to show if the numbers have decreased. However, the overall number of children in detention (261, 200) (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021) appears small when weighed up with the worldwide youth population of 1.2 billion individuals (Lore, 2020). The youth crime landscape as evidenced statistically shows that global youth crime is decreasing when viewing the number of children being detained or imprisoned due to criminal behaviour.

Youth Crime in New Zealand

With the landscape set as youth crime decreasing globally, this section analyses New Zealand specific statistics to identify whether the same trends appear. Prior to discussing research and statistical evidence of youth crime, the section begins with judicial processes for youth offenders in New Zealand. Then proceeds to explore data from the 1980s to 2023 for a comprehensive analysis of the developing trend. It is noted that different measures such as the number of charges and offending and conviction rates are used to provide an overview of youth crime in New Zealand. Table 3 further deconstructs the data for Oceania youth incarceration rates to understand whether New Zealand contributed to the overall increase in the region.

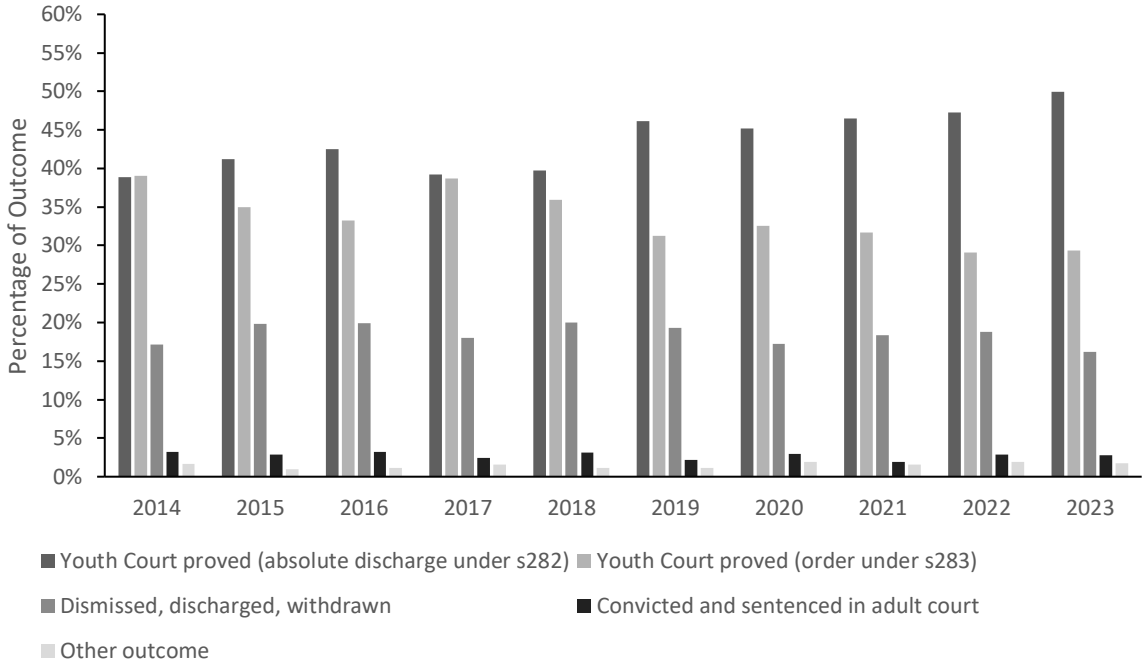
The process of reprimanding youth offenders takes into account their age of responsibility of 10 years old. Children offenders from the age of 10 to 16 years old, when arrested, can undergo a process of reprimand either through family court or youth court (Chong, 2007). This will result in several different outcomes for youth in New Zealand; a family group conference where a plan is created for the care and protection of the child, bail in the community, counselling services, and

reparation (Lynch, 2019; Slater et al., 2014). Harsher punishments are considered depending on the child's offending which can lead to youth court orders and further sentencing in adult courts (Chong, 2007; Cleland & Quince, 2014).

As the legal proceedings have set the tone for identifying youth offending in New Zealand, statistical evidence is used to create a picture of the rising trends. Figures presenting the number of charges per case in 14 to 16 year olds between 1980 to 2006 showed that there was a dramatic reduction of youth being dealt in court after 1989. The figures correspond with the average number of charges per case as only serious youth offending was taken to court (Chong, 2007). The trend continued between the years 2001 and 2010 for children 10 to 16 years old as the rate of youth offending and police apprehensions steadily declined to 20% (2010) from 27% (2001). This is reflected in the decreasing charges faced in court as they went from 1273 convictions (2001) to 573 convictions (2010). A number accredited to the changing policies and alternative actions like warnings rather than arrests made by the police (Ministry of Justice, 2013). New Zealand continues the decreasing number of youth charged in court as shown in Figure 2. The trend shows that the rate of conviction remains constant between 2-3% over the past decade (Ministry of Justice, 2024). Section 283 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 Children's Act also known as the Young People's Well-being Act 1989 where a child is to be convicted and sentenced in adult court has declined from 39% to 29%. While section 282 which discharges the charge has increased from 39% to 50% (Ministry of Justice, 2024). Alternative methods such as family group conferences and restorative justice contribute to these figures (Lynch, 2019).

Figure 2

Percentage of Finalised Charges for Children and Young People in any Court, 2014-2023



Note. The data presents the percentage of 10 to 17 year olds that have finalised charge outcomes in any court including youth, district, and high court. (Ministry of Justice, 2024)

Despite numbers showing decreasing youth crime trends, the incarceration of youth in Table 3 appears to show an increase. Further examination of the incarceration of youth in New Zealand may provide a clearer understanding. Five youth justice residences across the nation hold up to 171 youths who are undergoing sentencing in the youth court (Oranga Tamariki, 2017). Statistical evidence presents that there has been an overall decrease of 36% for youth remanded in custody at youth justice residences between 2011 to 2022. In contrast to an increase of 29% (2022) from 20% (2011) of young people being remanded in custody when appearing in court. The increasing numbers in Table 3 can be measured to 59 youth incarcerated in 2011 to 86 youth. This may be representative of the increase of youth remanded in custody when they appear in youth court, rather than the overall decrease of youth remanded in custody. Statistical guidelines for data in Table 3 state that it is "….highly challenging without internationally standardized guidance and

suitable regulatory frameworks that establish roles and responsibilities as well as obligations for the collection, production and dissemination of data" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024, p.12). Therefore, the data represented in Table 3 may show an increase as opposed to the various New Zealand government agencies as a different method and/or variable of data collection was used.

Table 3

Young People held in Prisons, Penal Institutions or Correctional Institutions in Oceania

Oceania	Youth incarcerated per 100,000 of the average country rate 2021
New Zealand	86
Australia	819
New Caledonia	170
French Polynesia	40

Note. The data was collected from the annual United Nations Crime Trends Survey with additional. Data for Australia, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia was not available in 2011 and has not been included in Table 3. (United Nations, 2023)

The trends presented globally are on par with the statistics evidenced in New Zealand. Over time, there has been a steady decrease in youth crime across offending and incarceration for young people both globally and locally. Declining youth detention (globally) and youth remanded in custody (New Zealand) numbers provide insight into alternative methods of reprimanding youth offending and the development of progressive policies. Table 3 highlights the need for standardised data collection methods for youth crime universally to account for discrepancies that may arise when comparing data from different countries. The overall landscape of youth crime worldwide and in New Zealand displays a decrease in trends.

Factors Leading to Offending Behaviour for Young People

When considering youth crime it is imperative to understand the factors leading to young offender pathways. This section will define adolescent-limited and life-course persistent pathways as two main areas of youth offending. Biological, social, and systemic factors will be examined to understand their contribution to adolescent-limited and life-course persistent pathways.

An adolescent-limited pathway portrays a larger group of youth that engage in criminal activity during their adolescence. In young adulthood, youth are more likely to portray a temporary increase in anti-social behaviours and peer-led offending which often ceases upon exit of their adolescence (Moffit, 2017). In contrast to a life-course persistent pathway which indicates youth are more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour in their adolescence and do not desist from committing further offences throughout their lives. Life-course persistent pathways are associated with neuropsychological deficits linked to poor attention, hyperactivity, and familial and social disadvantages (Jolliffe et al., 2017) . There is a lower number of the general population that are described as life-course persistent offenders (Moffitt et al., 2001).

To distinguish between the two pathways, Assink et al. (2015) found that through a meta-analysis of several risk factors comparing life-course persistent and adolescent-limited offending, behavioural risk factors (aggression and alcohol/drug use) strongly determined a life-course persistent offender from adolescent-limited offender. Other factors such as familial relations, neurocognition, and attitudes showed a smaller difference (Assink et al., 2015). The Dunedin longitudinal study consisting of 457 males aged 3 to 18 years old emphasises the small proportion of youth associated with the life-course persistent pathway. The study explaining these offenders have neuropsychological issues that disrupt their sense of control, memory, and language. Poor environments with distorted family ties and substandard peer support leading to inadequate prosocial skills contributed to life-course offending (Ludbrook, 2012). The same results were noted in the Cambridge Study as a combination of risk factors including of troubled behaviour, high levels of

risk-taking, and parents with a criminal history, led to delinquent behaviour (Farrington et al., 2016). While adolescence-limited pathways are linked to a maturation gap that targets their transient state of antisocial behaviour, of which their environment and peer associations become a strong influence (Moffit, 2017). Ongoing discussions regarding factors contributing to adolescence-limited and life-course persistent offending pathways continue as research indicates the number of life-course persistent offenders may grow (Griffiths & Norris, 2019). Identification of biological, social, and systemic factors that lead to antisocial behaviours is vital to determine youth trajectory into adolescence-limited or life-course persistent offending.

Biological Factors

Biological factors can explain the role of genetics and hormones that shape an individual's behaviour. Understanding biological changes in youth can lead to identifying behaviours and disorders that show correlations with youth offending.

For instance, the morphology of the brain can affect the emotional and cognitive processes regulating behaviour that can lead to risk-taking (Steinberg, 2008). These neurological processes increase risk-taking behaviours and lead to the early onset of youth offending. Further biological factors such as the MAOA gene also known as the warrior gene, do not directly encode behaviours but interact with serotonin, noradrenaline, and dopamine to control emotional regulation and have been found to impact aggression and antisocial behaviours (Kretschmer et al., 2014; Ouellet-Morin et al., 2016). The interactions between MAOA genes and age show genetic influence on aggression in most criminal behaviour (Moffitt et al., 2011). Males who carried low activity of the MAOA gene and had been maltreated during childhood showed antisocial and aggressive behaviours (Byrd & Manuck, 2014; Caspi et al., 2017) with self-reports of violent and property offending between the ages of 16 to 30 years old.

Genetic correlations for predisposed criminal behaviour were hypothesised by Wertz and colleagues (2018). They examined a link between genetic risk for low educational attainment was

related to criminal behaviour. They identified in cohorts of the Dunedin longitudinal study to show that a polygenic risk was present in children who had lower academic abilities, self-esteem, and patterns of antisocial behaviour. Their study suggested that improvement in education institutions could prevent genetic influences from criminal activity (Wertz et al., 2018). While Lewis et al (2018) found in their study that psychopathic personality traits and criminal behaviour could be linked to common genetic factors with nonshared environmental factors. Their findings revealed that 39% of genetic influences could be credited to psychopathic traits, and 53% held criminal behaviour variance. Antisocial behaviours had a 41% variance for genetic influence and concluded that there needs to be an element of a genetic component when studying crime (Lewis et al., 2018).

Despite, genetic influences presenting evidence towards criminal offending; the interaction between childhood treatment (Bryd & Manuck, 2014) and institutional support (Wertz et al., 2018) can affect a young person's tendency to engage in risk-taking behaviour and criminal offending.

Social Factors

Bowlby (1982) introduced attachment theories which indicated that a child develops a positive and secure attachment style with their caregiver when they are feeling safe and secure with survival needs met by the caregiver. Children with secure attachment with their parents have less urge to engage in sexual activity, peer bonding, and risk-taking behaviours until they reach maturation in later years (TenEyck et al., 2018). Children without imminent care and supervision and a lack of engagement from parents have insecure attachments and can show risk-taking behaviours which can develop into offending and criminality (Ogilvie et al., 2014).

Anti-social tendencies may also arise when disruption to family structures occurs such as parents treating their children with negligence and physical abuse (Folorunsho et al., 2024). The interaction of family bonds, environment, and financial adversity results in high psychopathology in children with depression, oppositional defiant disorder, and conduct disorders (Fanti & Lordos, 2021; LeMoine et al., 2015;).

Peer attachments become focal during adolescence as parental influences are replaced with youth spending more time being with their peers. However, children with poor parental relationships tend to seek antisocial friendships (Sullivan et al., 2019). Andrews and Bonta (2006) have argued that gang membership in youth can result from anti-social tendencies that develop from rejecting conventional beliefs. These anti-social attitudes can relate to influences caused by their peers that exhibit similar deviant behaviour and from schooling environments (Muller & Minger, 2013; Rotger & Galster, 2019). Insecure attachments with peers can also lead to violent and non-violent adolescent offending (Wampler & Downs, 2009).

Harsh parental experiences lacking consistency can create traumatic experiences for children and an insecure attachment to be formed. In combination with peer influences from antisocial friendships can lead to delinquent youth behaviour (Farrington et al., 2023; Yoder et al., 2016).

Systemic Factors

The role of environmental, class, educational, and judicial institutions in communities can contribute to a child's offending rates. Disadvantaged neighbourhoods showed lower neurocognitive performance in youth. Instability in environments contributes to impulsive choices and risky behaviours through criminality (Steinberg, 2008; Hackman et al., 2021).

Class has a role in the emergence of criminal behaviour among youth as it shapes the individuals' lived experiences and their perception of the world (White & Wyn, 2014). The resources divided amongst various classes such as education, community, employment, and environment, have been associated with the functionality of the child succeeding within society (Svensson & Shannon, 2020). The impact of lower socio-economic neighbourhoods relates to the disadvantages and lack of resources experienced by the residents (Farrington et al., 2023; Goldstein, 1991). Goldstein (1991) argues youth to experience the turmoil of such disadvantages as they are not provided with the tools or knowledge to behave per acceptable social norms and values. They

further state that adolescents are unable to participate in activities that alleviate pro-social behaviour as their communities lack such amenities (McAra & McVie, 2010). The disorganisation of educational institutions can lead students to delinquent behaviour (Stager et al., 2024). The presence of guidance and adult supervision determines whether the child feels connected to their schooling environment and can explore their educational goals. Poor relationships with teachers and low engagement in school during their adolescent years lead to delinquent activities and engaging with antisocial peers (Esbensen et al.,1993; Rotger & Galster, 2019; Timmer et al., 2022).

Institutions seem to contribute to the growing disparities in youth linked to delinquent acts, especially in children who belong to a minority race (Boatswain-Kyte, 2024; Farrington et al., 2023). The racial makeup of the labelled youth offenders has been part of the conversation. With the marginalisation of ethnic people, the policing of youth from an ethnic-racial background was overrepresented in the justice system. Reporting of police colluding with media to criminalise young black people was presented to readers for a decade (Goldson & Muncie, 2015) with aggressive rhetorical constructions of people of colour being present in print media in 2020 (Hammond et al., 2024). This has developed a poor relationship between police and ethnic communities as they are less likely to report criminal activity based on the legal consequences they may face (Jones-Brown, 2007; Kassing et al., 2021).

Tremblay and Szyf (2010) discuss the term epigenetics which relates to how the environment may affect genetic predispositions. Genes affect the brain structure of youth in forming neuron connections towards brain functions, while the environment refines these connections by either solidifying or eliminating them. For youth that live within stressful environments with high crime rates, they are the connections that can be stabilised (Anreiter et al., 2017).

Biological, social, and systematic factors have overlapping research to exhibit genetic predispositions aligned with environmental factors, and environmental factors with parental and peer attachments to lead to risk-taking behaviour that increases criminality in youth. These factors

need to be considered when investigating youth offending in either adolescent-limited or life-course persistent trajectories. The examination of antisocial and risk-taking behaviours produced by the factors requires follow-up assessments from youth to adulthood (Beck & Ritter, 1992; Farrington, 2005) and will support in determining which trajectory youth offending will align with and whether it corresponds with the current youth crime trends. Additionally, this will support in identifying whether ram raiding behaviours are a result of which factors and whether it will contribute to adolescent-limited or life-course offending.

Types of Offending

The types of youth offending are detailed and differentiated to highlight the common offences present universally and in New Zealand. Youth are identified to commit a range of criminal activities but are more likely to engage in property crime, damaging property, and resisting arrest (Baidawi & Sheehan, 2019).

International research shows the Philippines refers to most of the crimes committed by their youth as “crimes of poverty”(p. 181). The research suggests that there are violent and sexual crimes committed by their youth. However, they are a minority in comparison to the property crimes committed (Spruit et al., 2016). India shows similarities with the Philippines as property crimes and robberies have historically been linked to youth criminal activity. An increase in violence-related crimes by youth has been observed, as young people between the ages of 16-18 years old commit murder, kidnapping, and rape-related offences (Hazra, 2021). Furthermore, a study conducted in Finland showed the most common criminal activities were property and traffic crimes (Elonheimo et al., 2010).

Countries comparable to New Zealand such as Canada show common offences committed by youth such as theft under $5000 for both males and females under the age of 18 years old. The other offences for females were common assault, justice violations, mischief and criminal code violations. While young males had mischief, drug offences, justice violations, and common assaults

as their main criminal behaviour (Mahoney et al., 2017). Australia had 66% of youth offenders committing property-related crimes in Victoria, and 58% of property offences in Queensland between 2008 to 2009 (Richards, 2011).

The global offences have some parallels to New Zealand as theft and shoplifting are the highest number of offences committed by youth between 2009 to 2013 (Spier & Wilkinson, 2016). For further types of offending in New Zealand, Table 4 provides a comprehensive definition of common offences in children aged 14 to 16 years old who have appeared in court. The offence types are divided to emphasise the specific crimes committed by New Zealand youth.

Table 4

Common Offence Types by Young People in New Zealand Courts

Offence type *(ANZSOC)	Common offences for youth in court
Homicide and related offences	Murder; manslaughter; driving dangerously resulting in a death.
Dangerous or negligent act endangering a person	Minor, serious and grievous assaults with common assault as the most frequent
Sexual assault and related offences	Indecent assaults, unlawful sexual connection, indecent act, and rape.
Dangerous or negligent act endangering a person	Dangerous, careless or reckless driving; sustained loss of traction
Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person	Behave or speak threateningly; threaten to kill or do grievous bodily harm
Robbery, extortion and related offences	Aggravated robbery; robbery; assault with intent to rob; demands to steal
Unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter	Burglary
Theft and related offences	All types of theft (with shoplifting being the most frequent); unlawfully takes or gets into a motor vehicle; receiving stolen property
Fraud, deception and related offences	Take, obtain or use a document or credit card for percuniary advantage; obtain by deception
Illicit drug offences	Possess cannabis or drug-related utensils; using cannabis

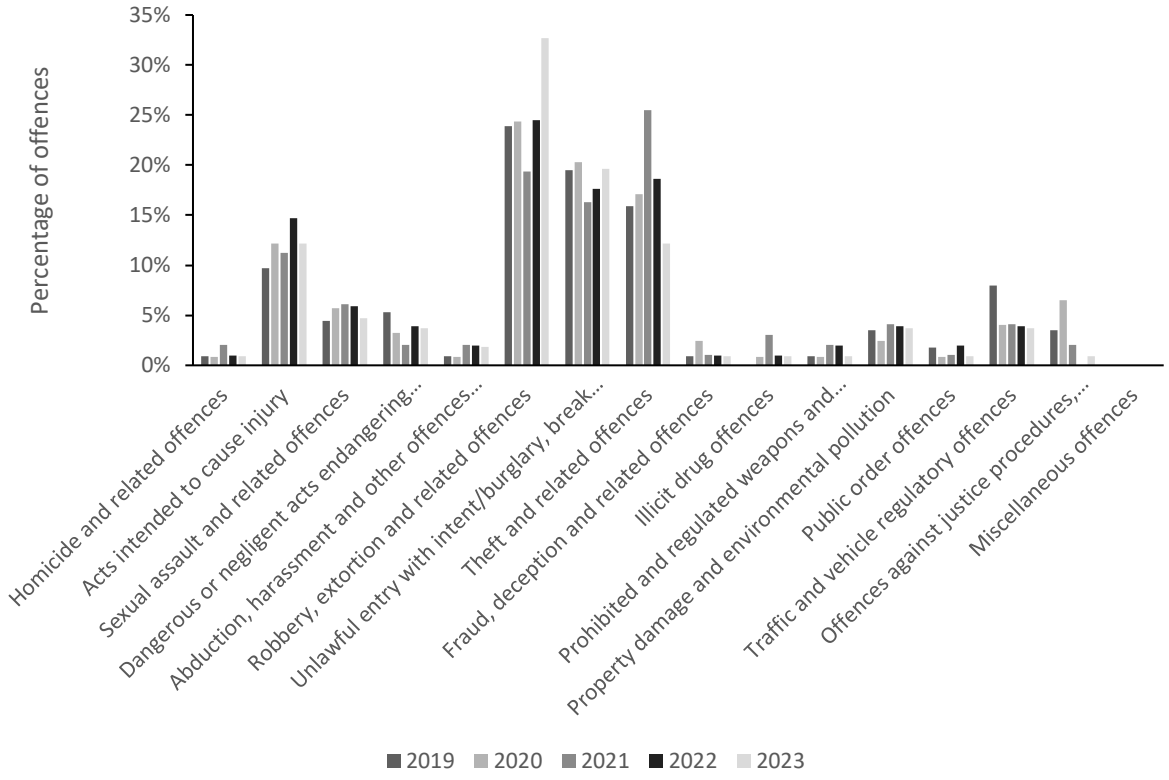
Prohibited and regulated weapons and explosives offences	Possess offensive weapon or knife
Property damage and environmental pollution	Wilful damage including graffiti-related offences; unlawfully interfere with motor vehicles; intentional damage; arson
Public order offences	Wilful trespass; disorderly behaviour; unlawfully in an enclosed yard, area or building; fighting in a public place; possessing instruments for car conversion; possessing instruments for graffiti
Traffic and vehicle regulatory offences	Driving with excess alcohol; driving while disqualified
Offences against government procedures, government security and government operations	Escaping lawful custody; resisting police; breach of bail; obstructing police; failing to furnish name and address
Miscellaneous offences	Used a telephone for a fictitious purpose, plus various other offences not included in the categories above

Note. * ANZSOC refers to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification. The data is derived from the Ministry of Justice Youth Justice Indicators Summary Report April 2023 (Ministry of Justice, 2023).

Figure 3 provides a more recent snapshot of offences carried out by New Zealand youth. The data indicates the highest offences committed are robbery, extortion and related offences from 24% in 2019 to 33% in 2023, with a decrease in 2021 to 19%. It is followed closely by unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter increasing from 19% (2019) to 20% (2023). Theft and related offences showed consistently high percentages over the years surpassing unlawful entry offences in 2021 by 26%. However, in 2023 the percentage had decreased to 12%.

Figure 3

Percentage of Finalised Charges for Children and Young People in any Court by Offence Type 2019-2023



Note. The data presents the percentage of offence types of 10 to 17 year olds that have finalised charge outcomes in any court including youth, district, and high court. The data is derived from the Ministry of Justice records (2023).

Despite property and burglary-related offences being most common globally and locally, the addition of youth in gangs has raised the numbers relating to drug and violence-related criminal activity (Howell & Decker, 1999; Gwata et al., 2024; O'Brien et al., 2013). Gangs are often related to criminal activity in regards to drug-related offences and organised criminal activity (Gilbert, 2013; Smith et al., 2018). Gangs recruit younger members prone to immaturity and form as many groups do, out of locality (Benier & Higginson, 2024; Burke & Sunley, 1998;). Various gangs ranged from

serious crimes to petty crimes that appeal to youths' adventurous nature (Burke & Sunley, 1998; Higginson et al., 2018).

A recent example would be the young people of New Zealand congregating together to conduct ‘ram raids’ by robbing local businesses (Chambers, 2022). The similarities between ram raiders and gangs exist through group offending behaviours. Research shows that the increase of youth gang-associated crimes is rising steadily with academic journals (Cahill et al., 2024; Campbell 1990; Fleisher, 1995; Moreno et al., 2024; Spergel 1995;) accrediting sociological factors to the increase of youth gang-affiliated crimes.

Despite countries that vary in their criminal justice policies and environmental makeup, most common offences are related to property, shoplifting, theft, and burglary-related crimes. However, there are growing concerns related to youth gang activity which may increase violent-related crimes committed by adolescents. Concerns are being extended towards youth group offending in the form of ram raids as it causes issues for business owners.

What are *Ram Raids* and who are the *Ram Raiders* ?

Accounts of ram raids can be traced to youth gangs such as the Salfordian gangs in the 19th century that ranged members between 10 to 25 years old. The main focus of the gang was usually associated with thefts, robberies, drugs, and ram raids (Mares, 2001). An account of a young gang member known as a young firm member states:

> Say we do one shop, yeah [ram raid, also known as a 'Crash and Carry'] take all the clothes and we can sell 'em within the hour, anything. Even if we've got fuckin' two quid pyjamas we can sell 'em in bulk. We sell our stuff to people, older ones who got loads of money. (p.158)

According to Taylor (1996), ram raids were referred to in urban folklore in South Manchester. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, young men were reported to have stolen from affluent citizens and store owners by driving cars into shops and taking off with the goods. These acts soon became

known as the *ram raids* and instilled fear within the locals of the neighbourhoods being targeted. Taylor (1996) described an incident where the windows of the local bakery were smashed in and was advertised by the shop owner as a ram raid. This was later discovered to have been caused by an elderly lady learning to drive her new car. Due to the distinct nature of the event, the owner was easily coerced to consider that this must have been carried out as a ram raid.

Ram raiders have also been defined as an individual who commits burglary by entering a building as a trespasser and attempting or succeeding at stealing anything from the building. A group activity with incidents of ram raiding being identified as smash-and-grab raids from the early 1930s (Donald & Wilson, 2000). It appears that ram raiding becomes congruent with the common offences shown globally which may be a result of factors that lead youth to such behaviour.

It appears ram raiders have historically been associated with youth who have carried out theft and breaking and entering related offences and had connections to gangs. For this study, the terms *ram raids, ram raiders* and/or *ram raiding* will be referred to throughout this thesis to indicate youth that are engaging in burglary-related offending and unlawful entry onto premises.

Ram Raiders in New Zealand

Ram raids have resurfaced in recent years in New Zealand, with growing interest in the number of children and youth participating in ram raiding behaviour. The term ram raid offending has recently been amended in *New Zealand legislation Crimes Act 1961*, *Sentencing Act 2002*, and *Oranga Tamariki Act 1989* which refers to youth entering commercial businesses using a motor vehicle and causing intentional damage to the property (New Zealand Police, 2024; NZ Legislation Disclosures, 2023). The amendments were created to reduce criminal offending specifically in young children and differentiate ram raiding from mainstream criminal acts (NZ Legislation Disclosures, 2023). This may appear in judicial and police recordings as unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter unlawful entry with intent, and robbery, extortion and related offences (New Zealand Police, 2024).

The New Zealand Police report compiled a year's worth of data on 283 ram raids that had occurred, with an increase of 167% in ram raids since 2016 (Chambers, 2022). The information stated that 59% of the individuals involved in the ram raids were aged between 14 to 17 years old with 17 percent under the age of 13. Police information further states that ram raids have affected New Zealand small business owners and chain stores as they are often the targets of burglaries by this group (New Zealand Police, 2022). The report further advised that four per cent of the youths involved in the criminal activity were patched gang members. While the other five per cent of them had gang associations or links to various gangs. The primary offence for ram raiding remains as burglary which has shown a 16% increase for youth between 2021 to 2022 (Ministry of Justice, 2023).

Research on Ram Raids

Apart from the casual mention of the term ram raids (Dawes, 2002; Drakeford & Gregory, 2010) or ram raiders to describe crimes of theft/burglary/robbery using motor vehicles, there does not seem to be much recent research associated with the term. With the exception of youth reports presented by various government agencies in New Zealand (Ministry of Justice, 2023; New Zealand Police, 2024, Chambers 2022); research is almost non-existent when investigating youth ram raids in New Zealand. Given the police reports of drastic increases in ram raiding behaviour in New Zealand, there does not seem to be any research available on the subject. This thesis is concerned with the lack of research available on ram raids and the consequences it may lead to for youth.

The researcher notes that the term ram raiders is recently defined through legislation which makes the data collection process difficult for government agencies and researchers to compile information. However, with the reporting of growing ram raid numbers, the effect of ram raids on businesses, and policies on prosecution for youth, further information is required to understand youth participating in ram raids.

Media as an Institution

Media seems to be at the forefront of reporting most ground breaking issues that affect the world, with the ram raids not being an exception. As noted the scarcity of information on ram raids and the reported growing ram raiding numbers can lead public members to seek information elsewhere. The media provides a platform for information that is easily accessible and available for all. This section draws on the media as an institution that holds power in portraying the subjects of their articles.

Michel Foucault (1977) discusses Bentham's panopticon as a figure used to enforce power and control through surveillance of individuals outside of the structure. The person inside the tower is the enforcer of rules and is unable to be seen from the outside. Therefore, the panopticon becomes a device to drive individuals on the outside into a state of consciousness towards the power held by the structure, regardless of whether anyone is enforcing the rules (Foucault, 2008). Foucault (1977) characterised the Panopticon as a model for organising the power relations of society. The citizens become subjected to constant visibility ensuring a continuum of functioning power structures.

The Panopticon once represented by institutions such as churches, schools, and the government; has now been transformed for modern day settings with the same traditional functions portrayed in media institutions (Silverblatt, 2004). Thompson (1995) describes modern media in comparison to the Panopticon as:

> The Panopticon renders many people visible to a few and enables power to be exercised over the many by subjecting them to a state of permanent visibility, the development of communication media provides a means by which many people can gather information about a few and, at the same time, a few can appear before many; thanks to the media, it is primarily those who exercise power, rather than those over whom power is exercised, who are subjected to a certain kind of visibility. (p. 134)

For this study, the visibility and information provided by a panopticon-like structure like media becomes vital as research is unreadily available on this term. Media becomes a source for citizens to seek information about ram raiders, while media uses their readership to control knowledge about ram raiders and present details which enhances their power and continued allegiance from audiences.

Thompsons' (1995) statement indicates that the constant surveillance of media deprives individuals of their privacy which instates a power structure. Gross (2017) criticises the media for their portrayal of "sensational stories – often in the form of infotainment" (p.106) as the privacy of private citizens and public figures is undermined. Media can control the narrative as they have the "power to mislead" by censoring material, disinformation, and institutionalised methods of infantilising judgments (Lukes, 2021, p.149). Specific to this study, the media can use information to their benefit to control the narrative of ram raiders and their representation to readers. Whilst, Castells (2009) claims that media does not hold power but rather "they are much more important: they are the space of power-making. The media constitute the space where power relationships are decided between competing political and social actors" (p. 194). The media controls platforms that play host to powerholders from various powerful networks as political figures who have to accept the rules of media for their aspirations to become attainable. The powerholders are the deciders towards legislative changes and become bound by the media's rules in enforcing consequences that align with the depictions of ram raiders. All theories allude that media is an institution that holds a form of power over its audiences by providing information that is censored through their processes (Freedman, 2015; King et al., 2017).

In relation to the current study, media as an institution provides information on a growing phenomenon of ram raiders and depicts a narrative to readers. They use multiple powerholders which will be explored in the results section, to enforce these representations. Consequently, this results in policies and judicial outcomes on young people engaging in ram raids.

State Media as a Site of Public Discourse of *Ram Raiders*

The media has been vocal about presenting the recent events of thefts and linking it to the term ram raids. The researcher understands the role of news discourses and explores the narratives currently being portrayed to society by understanding the position of "powerholders" (Castells, 2009, p.194) present in media.

In media, these powerholders constitute writers who can reach audiences through the use of their empathetic language and can create positive changes (Foxman et al., 2021). Media platforms provide them with the power to produce discourses (Peters & Appel, 1996). Discourse is "language use in context" (Vine, 2023 p.4). To expand, the analysis of discourses refers to how individuals communicate to relay information about social, cultural, and political spheres. In this context, the written communicative form of media articles provides readers with an understanding of ram raiders (Vine, 2023). The associative language in media articles can become suggestive towards a relationship between the words and form discourses (De Deyne et al., 2018). News discourses become a source of knowledge for audience members to base their attitudes and ideologies on the information received (Van Dijk, 1998). The discourses in this study will be further defined in the methods section through a Foucauldian lens. The current section explores the presence of a political narrative and how public opinions are formed.

Political Narrative in the Media

Political leaders possess influence when addressing social matters which affect the public such as ram raids (Fawzi, 2017; King et al., 2017). This power is extended to authoritative members such as the police as readers are receptive to information received from them (Ralph, 2021). They become powerholders that are utilised by media institutions as they hold a degree of responsibility towards the public as they provide information to rational voters partaking in future policy outcomes (Strömberg, 2015). The framing of information based on the inclusion and omission of particular information that serves the individual or group agenda is better known as media bias. This

bias usually favours power structures and fails audiences in providing them with impartial information that supports rational decision-making (Jamieson & Kenski, 2017; Wolfsfeld, 2022). Accountability is also placed on media as they can act as gatekeepers in essentially determining information that is reported to the public (Partington & Duguid, 2020). Censorship of information can evolve into ideologies that are reproduced into discourses which may resort to structures of ingroups and outgroups (Van Dijk, 2013). The relationship between media and politicians is defined as symbiotic as they mutually collaborate to achieve their own goals. Political leaders gain public influence by accessing mass supporters through media platforms, and the media collects information from politicians to produce material for their readership (DiMaggio, 2018).

Politicians and authoritative figureheads are instruments media use to form discourses as they are trusted members of the public. Their presence on a media issue justifies a cause for panic over a group that may be challenging the organisation of power structures. Youth partaking in risk-taking behaviour such as ram raiders becomes an issue for political leaders to provide their views on, and information to citizens contributing to their decisions for future policies that affect youth.

Public Opinion

Additionally, public media posts from news agencies on topical subjects can facilitate citizen-to-citizen conversations as accessibility to communicating one's opinion is made easily available online (Partington & Duguid, 2020). Conflicting commentary on issues such as ram raids can include diverse opinions into pluralist politics and redefine power structures that traditionally excluded the audience (Pettit et al., 2009). However, providing the public with a voice on social issues can reinforce negative discourses harmful to minority groups. As Brindle (2018) shows citizens co-construction and reinforcement of one another's prejudices and hate speech towards minority groups. Consequently, citizen-to-citizen communication can encounter negative or positive reactions dependant on the morality of the reader and their perspective on the matter.

Furthermore, public opinions showcased a *victim* and *villain* discourse can be established. For instance, the public advocating for supportive policies for ram raiders view them as victims. While, readers seeking punishment for ram raiders perceive them as villains (Hansen Löfstrand, 2009). Victim discourses can extend to targets of crimes when offenders are framed as responsible for victimisation while diminishing their value (DiBennardo, 2018). Additionally, the use of emotive language in media publications can gain social empathy from audiences (Manney, 2008; Tabbert, 2016). Media and subsequent powerholders perpetuate these images which may be constructed for their objectives (Gill et al., 2012). Berns (2017) highlights media attention on violence against women has increased signifying positive societal attitudes towards reducing gender inequalities. The media accounts focus on supporting women as victims rather than accountability on perpetrators. Therefore, diverting attention from the underlying causes and individualising the issue.

The news media is a product formed through political, economic, and social commentary, rather than a reflection of reality (Van Dijk, 2010). Information is framed through social norms, values, and ideologies to produce certain discourses (Gill et al., 2012). The role of political leaders is significant as their interactions with criminal issues such as increasing ram raids can harness real-life consequences on youth. Additionally, political leaders possess the power to control the narrative represented in media as it provides political information to voters who are responsible for electing future governments, and sequentially policies. Audience members engaging in discussions in online news media forums also hold the power to reinforce certain discourses. However, the media overarches politicians and citizens through institutional power as it determines the finality of all publications distributed.

Moral Panic

With the abundance of chatter around ram raids and how it is negatively affecting the youth and communities of New Zealand, is there a moral panic arising amid these media reports? This

section defines moral panic and further explores the themes of racial underpinnings and outgroups in juxtaposition to ram raids in New Zealand.

The term *moral panic* described by Stanley Cohen (1972) in his text *Folk Devils and Moral Panics,* is a societal threat caused by an event, person, or group of people that disrupts the normality of collective values and is often reported by mass media (Hunt, 1997). The gatekeepers of such moral values can often be found among political figures, religious leaders, editors, and other valued members of society who tend to upkeep the status quo (Cohen, 2011). Moral panics can be limited to short or long periods and can lead to changes in policies to diminish or discard the threat (Hunt, 1997). Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) identify the presence of five main categories to determine a moral panic: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) a moral panic can exist in the context of media if the main consensus of media articles shows concern and hostility towards ram raiders with a disproportional amount of articles that show a certain stance and appears unpredictably in a short period.

The role of the media towards moral panic in New Zealand was highlighted in the 1950s about sexualised behaviour, children's access to indecent literature and youth gang formations (Krzanich, 2010; Manning, 1958). Groups of teenagers involved in increasing youth crimes also known as the *bodgies* and *widigies*, was a term that gave juvenile delinquency a youth identity that shared similar interests (Eggleston, 2000). The influences from popular culture led young people to take up leather jackets and rolled-up jeans as fashion statements while exhibiting risk-taking behaviours categorising them as gang members (Stratton, 1984). Bessant and colleagues (1998) conceptualised Stratton's analysis as "working at the discursive level as he wishes to suggest that there was a categorical conflation between 'teenagers' and 'bodgies and widgies' built into a 'moral panic'" (p.219). Implying teenage bodgies and widgies were becoming a concern for moral panic through discursive measures. Esbensen and Tusinski (2007) explained stereotypes of gang members being formed in the media "young gangs are problematic enough in reality without the media

contributing to exaggerations of their attributes that are associated with violence and organizational capacity" (p.1). Ethnic minorities were associated with gang members at a higher percentage and misconceptions about gang members were constantly formed. Gang members are often shown as violent groups of individuals who are partaking in delinquent activities and receive negative attitudes from the public (Klein, 1971; Wolf 2012; Woo, 2017). In contrast, youth offenders today participating in robbery-related offences and are labelled as ram raiders raise similar implications.

Media was instrumental in depicting the two high-profile incidents as national juvenile delinquency by condemning youth as "disturbing and immoral" (Krzanich, 2010, p.169). The use of headlines which provides the media with an instrumental tool to engage readers towards their stories or lead audiences to make assumptions based on headlines signifies the writer's coverage of their discourses (Lee, 2020; Moore, 2014). The addition of commentary from political leaders trying to fix the issues by exaggerating the situation for their own agenda drowned the voices of those who were dismissing the exaggerated notions of the press. Media was being scrutinised for their reporting as news broadcasts featured the majority of violent crimes even though statistical figures did not represent what was being shown to the masses (Maguire et al., 2007). In response, the elaborate coverage of such acts leads to the public questioning the morality of their society and creates a disparity between reality and media (Marsh & Melville, 2019). Thus begins a cycle of misinformation to the public which leads to discourses of them fearing becoming a victim (Buttle & Rodgers, 2014; Ericson, 1995). An exaggeration of stories in the media can lead to creating moral panics and negating the perception of the subject presented (Garland, 2008).

It should be noted that the interpretation of what is presented in the media may vary amongst various audience members and produce opposing discourses. Such as the narrative it is presented in and whether the article appeals to a certain area of the audience's moral beliefs, which may have a significant impact on their interpretation (Maguire et al., 2007).

Racial Underpinnings

There are news outlets that have been responsible for depicting stories with racial elements (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Bull, 2017). To grasp the concept of rising discourses in media by labelling certain groups; the racial underpinnings will be discussed in this section. It will highlight previous media reports with racial undertones and how they can emerge as problematic consequences for minority groups.

Researchers in New Zealand have sought studies to showcase the representations of minority communities and the negative portrayal of them in the media (Allen & Bruce, 2017). Media can be a source of creating social identities with negative identities setting such groups up for wider threats and leading to serious risks (Stavenhagen, 2006; Thompson, 1995). Loto et al (2006) offer insights into representations of Pacific Islanders in New Zealand media, presenting them as lazy and unhealthy and increasing criminal activity. Maydell et al (2021) claimed similar patterns for representations of Māori communities as racism in *The Taranaki Daily News* was identified as supporting racist and anti-minority policies against Māori populations. These studies show stigmatic labelling creates stereotyping behaviour that links groups with certain labels that are perceived to be threatening power structures and can harm the reintegration of ex-offenders entering their communities (Quinn-Hogan, 2011; Smyrnova, 2015).

Bull (2017) depicts the media as portraying racialised criminal stories of the indigenous Māori population of New Zealand from the 1960s to 1970s as a result of the economic crash that was occurring during this period. Māori and Pacific populations were scapegoated as a threat to the country by providing stories that centred on crime, protests, and gang violence.

This was identified as a violation of the *New Zealand Press Council* rules as Māori individuals were being linked to criminal activity in media reports four times more than Pakeha offenders (Kernot, 1990). The media reporting questions the owner's agendas behind large publications and news channels, which are predominantly governed by non-Māori (Barnes et al., 2013; MacDonald &

Ormond, 2021). The agenda of the owners of media publications can lead to symbolic annihilation and institutionalised racism which function as a power structure in dispersing certain discourses to the public. Klein & Shiffman (2009) have described the term symbolic annihilation as the media underrepresenting some groups in their reporting. Nairn et al. (2012) assign the term symbolic annihilation directly to the New Zealand context with the Pakeha population using media to marginalise Māori. The role of institutionalised racism occurs when racism operates with legal and political frameworks that control societal institutions (Jones, 2000). Both terms can be applied to societal racism as the production of mass media creates certain biases for the marginalised groups to the audience.

A study that researched responses from a non-Māori audience of the media showed that reporting in newspapers about Māori was dominantly negative and that there was a marginally larger imbalance of negative associations with Māori than Pakeha people (Gregory et al., 2011).

> Amanda: 'I think we all know it's about crime and stuff. If you have no contact with Māori, all you get in the media is the crime rates—all those sort of statistics are always in the paper. You never hear any good stories . . . I just think we judge Māori from the papers, from the news media, and we get a very negative view.' (group 1)(p.56)

The study further divulged the Pakeha views present in media creating such conversations among the participants, with some addressing the lack of cultural competency of the reporters and presenting stories in the media through a Pakeha prejudice (Gregory et al., 2011). The lack of Māori cultural understanding can lead to inaccurate media reporting and lay the foundations of distrust between two groups.

> Kelly: 'It just feeds paranoia and fear, what people have anyway. But I guess you don't get a lot of feel-good stories. I mean, you often hear reading about the abuse and child abuse and crime. You know, they stick in your mind, and stealing bodies and taking them back to the pa, and those

stories I find confusing, really confusing from a Pakeha's point of view. I still don't know who's right and who's wrong, or why it should be in the paper anyway.' (Pakeha group 2) (p.57)

The representations of marginalised communities become significant in the media as they are often internalised by other members of the community. The negative stereotypes that indigenous communities are labelled with create certain discourses that decide the social order and can lead to minority groups becoming synonymous with the words used to describe them. Ram raids provide a perfect example of the term which has now become associated with youth especially when the perpetrators are identified as of ethnic descent.

Outgroups

Within the New Zealand context, media largely affects such marginalised communities and the way they are portrayed to other members of society with lasting effects (Spoonley & Butcher, 2009). Early media language used the terms *us* and *them* to create partisanship amongst groups with emphasis on individuals in the *us* becoming followers of universal moral codes with *them* groups resisting moral behaviour such as legislation and law (Fiske & Hancock, 2016; Van Dijk, 2010).

The othering of marginalised groups does not stop at ethnic disparities, however, and can affect other spheres of the individuals' lives. There are certain stereotypes created towards indigenous groups. Different stereotypes can lead to the formation of prejudice; for this study, the stereotype is that indigenous people are more likely to be linked to crime in the media. Brown (2010) describes prejudice as a set of irrational beliefs and generalisations that allow one group to act negatively towards another group or its members. Intergroup relations are usually determined by conflict over power, resources, or other disparities. By incorporating labels into daily lives and assigning categories to groups based on their similarities and differences there is a categorisation that occurs cognitively (Allen & Wilder, 1975; Brown, 2010). The existence of categorising individuals into groups based on traits such as race and socioeconomic status, there is a divide that occurs between them (Rabbie & Wilkens, 1971). This can be referred to as intergroup discrimination when

people belonging to one group favour their group over the other through their judgements (Brown, 2010; Rabbie & Horwitz, 1969).

Given reports in the media about indigenous communities being linked to criminal activity have usually been through tumultuous times (Allen & Bruce, 2017), the reflections can be drawn upon the current social climate. As one study found, the media representation of South Auckland shows a predominant population of Pasifika (66%) and Māori (40%) individuals (Allen & Bruce, 2017). Despite there being many topical issues in the media about South Auckland, there was a markedly higher number of articles that reported stories associated with crime. Thus producing stories that portrayed areas populated by Māori and Pasifika communities as dangerous.

The rise of ram raid reports occurred simultaneously with the COVID-19 pandemic and economic distress within New Zealand. Studies show an overall decrease in crime, with an increase in theft and burglary-related crimes (Cheung & Gunby, 2023; Nivette et al., 2021). During a stressful period, discriminatory behaviour towards the outgroups (youth ram raiders) begins from the *ingroup*s (general public) which can create new disparities for the *outgroups* such as new legislations to criminalise youth that can have follow-up criminogenic effects (Tajfel, 1970; Zhou & Zeng, 2023). However, if ram raiders are established as outgroups in the public eye through media reports. The general public may perceive harsh punishments on youth are justified known as the outgroup homogeneity effect where less is known about the outgroups and their punishment is undifferentiated (Hee et al., 2011; Linville et al, 1989). Groups such as ram raiders can be further *othered* through the addition of being part of groups that may affect the social makeup (Benier & Higginson, 2024). This can include media affiliating young ram raiders with gangs and ethnic minorities forming a group threat theory as these groups can threaten the social structures of a community (Blalock, 1967; Celebi et al., 2017). Individuals within the ingroups that may have experiences with youth ram raiders from their daily interactions may feel more inclined to more prosocial methods of dealing with their offending. However, the rule of human categorisation and

social order of us vs them may direct them to agree with their ingroup as it is deemed appropriate behaviour by their group (Han, 2022; O'Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007; Tajfel, 1970).

Despite the numbers portrayed by local New Zealand statistics which show there has been a decrease of youth crime in New Zealand. The media being a powerful institution can exploit factors and use tools such as political and public rhetoric to create certain discourses towards the issue of ram raiders. Additionally, racial underpinnings and outgroup narratives created through empathetic language and censorship of information are employed to benefit media institutions through increased readership. Media labelling and stereotyping can obscure factors that lead youth to offending. There is no denying mass media plays a significant role in the production of common knowledge about science-based information with the inclusion of information not derived from scientific underpinnings (Calsamiglia & Van Dijk, 2004, p.351). The media can control an agenda which provides a platform for discourses to arise to form moral panics and contribute to public reactions.

How will this Study inform Social Change?

A discursive approach is undertaken in the current study to contribute to the wider discussion of youth crime in Aotearoa New Zealand by focusing on how the specific notion of ram raids is formed in the media and shapes the wider conversation of law enforcement and criminal justice. For instance, the Youth Crime Action Plan (Ministry of Justice, 2013) created from 2013 to 2023 was a governmental strategy to reduce youth crime in the next 10 years. The plan included collaboration with community stakeholders and whanau that can support the process. A de-escalation on the level of criminal punishment on youth by providing interventions such as family group conferences before reaching formal interventions by the court. A community-based approach and rehabilitative care can increase desistance towards youth offending (Rodríguez Gutiérrez, 2019; Sellers, 2014) and address wider issues (Mallett & Boitle, 2015). Lastly, by providing youth with an opportunity to exit criminal offending by offering a sustainable exit strategy with diversions to other

opportunities that may be beneficial for young people (Ministry of Justice, 2013). Additionally, other measures such as the amendment of the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989) support decarceration, victims' rights, and the inclusion of family input for children under 14 years old. The act was amended in 2010 and included any young person offending must be privy to interventions that attend to any underlying concerns. The policies prepared for youth have resulted in decreasing youth offending rates for children aged between 14 to 16 years old (Polglase & Lambie, 2023).

A punitive approach towards young people by incarcerating them for offences such as ram raiding can lead them to return to criminal behaviours and increase recidivism rates (Kurlychek et al., 2022; Moran et al., 2024). The repercussions associated with incarcerated youth are ongoing mental health issues, lower self-esteem and more chances of engaging in drugs and self-harm (Lambie & Randell, 2013; Tasisa & Palanimuthu, 2021).

With the recent general elections in New Zealand, the topics of youth offending and ram raids have been a central focus of policy and social responses to addressing this issue. It is acknowledged that rehabilitative programmes have been shown to understand the complexities of young people engaging in criminal acts (Sandøy et al., 2022). Therefore this study will provide information on whether media representations of ram raiders are contributing to legislative consequences for young people. This information can be analysed towards policy reforms for youth to understand whether these decisions are products of discourses arising in media.

Current Study: Rise of the Ram Raids

Since the role of the media has been central to both the distribution of information about youth offending as well as shaping public perceptions about those who are involved in ram raids. This study will analyse the news stories in the New Zealand media and how they position the participants of ram raids and what the discursive consequences of these narratives can be. The analysis will provide an insight into what discursive practices are utilised by the New Zealand media and how

these practices contribute to wider conversations about moral panic and stricter criminal enforcement for young people who offend. Therefore, the research questions are:

1. How do the discourses presented by news media portray ram raiders?
2. What are the legislative consequences for ram raiders as a result of discourses created by the media?

Chapter Three: Method and Data Analysis

This chapter discusses the methodology used to conduct this study. This section begins with broad research traditions as to how youth crime has been researched. I discuss my positioning and consider a variety of analyses before focusing on my selected approach: Foucauldian discourse analysis. The procedure portion of this study consists of the data collection processes, criteria of selection of the newspapers, research tools, and analytical framework. Given the study has used a Foucauldian discourse approach, the analytical framework is further explained to advise on the process used to identify discourses in the results section. The chapter concludes with my statement and an explanation of the ethical considerations that have taken place whilst conducting this study.

Epistemological Orientation

As a researcher, I acknowledge the various methods that have traditionally been used to research youth crime. Research on youth crime is vast and has been studied in psychology in various theories. I will discuss broad research concepts of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, that have produced extensive research with a variety of different approaches to youth crime. The researcher will further highlight research approaches of demography, ethnography, and governmental studies. In addition, the study undertakes material from the overall theories in discursive psychology, drawing in on discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and Foucauldian discourse analysis. Foucauldian discourse analysis framework was guided by Michel Foucault and Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2011) as it provides an appropriate fit with the research questions.

Traditional Research Methods

In the field of youth crime, qualitative elements are distinguishable by understanding and representing the participant perspectives, accounting for real-world contextual conditions, acknowledging the relevance of multiple sources, and insights into concepts that explain social behaviour (Yin, 2016). Qualitative methods use interpersonal elements like interviews to present the experiences of youth participating in programmes that reduce the likelihood of criminal and anti-

social behaviour (Cobbina et al., 2019; Kelly, 2012). There are limitations when engaging in qualitative methods as the credibility of the information is subject to participants and code mapping as the data requires a thorough verification process (Yin, 2016). Qualitative research includes specialised variants of the method that extend to discourse analysis, which is explored further in this chapter.

In contrast, quantitative research collects quantifiable data through experimental and questionnaire-based methods (Jansson-Boyd, 2018). Quantitative methods provide efficient coverage of participant information and can show trends in youth crime statistics in correlation to other factors such as socio-economic communities (McCarthy, 2020). Assessing trends in youth crime shows statistical evidence in detecting delinquent behaviour patterns and risk factors (Gupta et al., 2022). However, quantitative research is not without limitations, as it can be time-consuming and small sample sizes can affect the reliability of the low quantifiable data (Denscombe, 2010).

Mixed methods combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches being described as “a new star in the social science sky” (Mayring, 2007, p.1). It provides an intuitive way of examining the world and can be seen used by many professionals (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For instance, policymakers when assessing criminal policies for youth, analyse both statistical trends and personal experiences of youth and other stakeholders affected by the changes (Douglas, 2023). Despite having the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods which offset the weaknesses of each other; mixed methods can be a time and resource-consuming process that requires sufficient analysis of both quantifiable and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Although youth crime utilises a number of research methods, demography, ethnography, and governmental publications are explained thoroughly as the processes align with the questions of this study. Additionally, the literature presented in Chapter One includes studies that apply the following research methods. Each research measure is defined exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology to examine its applicability to the current study.

Population Studies: Formal Demography

A recent definition states "demography is the scientific study of human population, including its size, distribution, composition, and the factors that determine changes [therein]. [It] focuses on five aspects of human population: (1) size, (2) distribution, (3) composition, (4) population dynamics, and (5) socioeconomic determinants and consequences of population change" (Siegel & Swanson, 2004, p.1). Four main demographic data sources are identified as population censuses, surveys, population registers, and other administrative systems that permit demographic data (Carmichael, 2016).

Andersen et al (2016) utilized demographic analysis using the administrative system of the Danish registry accounting for age predictors of children 15 to 17 years old and presented data on declining youth crime in Denmark. Results produced decreasing youth criminal rates through the analysis of year and birth cohort. Administrative systems seem to be an attractive option for demographic studies and are popular as they have available data from government sources that generate population issues (Carmichael, 2016). This data which is readily available on ram raiders through the New Zealand Police would serve to identify common demographics of ram raiders. As shown Gomis-Pomares and colleagues' (2021) study predicts risk factors of youth recidivism with demographic variables of age (14 to 18 years old), gender, and type of offence committed by the use of an administrative system of youth level of service of case management inventory. Variables of age and gender highlighted that young boys committing violent crimes required better prevention strategies (Gomis-Pomares et al., 2021). Conducting demographical studies allows the tailoring of programmes suited to children who possess risk factors prone to youth crime. This would present sufficient evidence to adapt community-based programmes to the risk factors of young people engaging in ram raids.

Demographic research identifies factors that are present in youth-risk populations that are to be targeted according to age. However, the approach does not serve the purpose of this thesis as a demographic approach is not relevant and the data used in demographic studies does not provide

sufficient material for identifying discourses for ram raiders. A demographic study would restrict the parameters of the current thesis as it does not include media in the main data source and will focus on demographics, not discourses that arise from media representations of ram raids.

Ethnography

Ethnography focuses on the social world by describing and theorising by observing its participants and concluding how they function (Kwame Harrison, 2018). Further described as "the study and representation of culture as used by particular people, in particular places, at particular times" (Maanen, 2011, p. 155). An ethnographic study was carried out to observe how the relationship between police and "trouble makers" (Porsche, 2020, p. 1) progressed in a prevention programme. The observations detailed at the beginning of the study described youth were reluctant to work with the officers. However, this progressed as youth became more involved and eventually the project was a collaborative process between the two groups. The study highlighted that police prevention work would be beneficial in building community relationships between the two groups, but may come with its risks and cause controversy from new alliances formed. Ethnography would be functional for studies of ram raiders if the thesis determined the relationships between governmental organisations and programmes being effective for young ram raiders. Further examination of institutions was shown by Gray and Salole's (2005) as it observed a young offender facility in Canada to understand the constructions of punishment of youth. The study found a culture of punishment and social control existed within the facility, with authority exerted by custody staff as a way to "define boundaries" (p. 670).

Ethnography becomes a powerful tool in assessing the strengths and adversities of programmes run through organisations to deter youth crime (Porsche, 2020). Although, the researcher notes that the study has limitations that can affect the results of the study. Such as observer bias as researchers subconsciously influence their observation through pre-existing assumptions (Kwame Harrison, 2018). Observational processes though able to identify existing discourses; the current study does not choose to employ an ethnographical discourse approach.

Digital ethnography raises concerns regarding the irregularities of making observations through online media texts (Masullo & Coppola, 2023). The researcher has reservations that ethnography may be compromised in the process as the form of communication varies and does not allow for researchers to conduct in-person observations as necessary in the ethnography portion of the study. Ethnographic research allows for general claims of media texts but they "cannot adequately answer questions as to *why* people are using a particular site [and] how their practices emerge from and complement their offline lives" (Tagg and Seargeant, 2016, p. 351). This can skew interpretations of the current study and make it difficult to identify arising Foucauldian discourses as media text is the dominant corpus used.

Government Publications

Governmental data usually comprises statistical evidence presented in reports in the format of a graph or table (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024; New Zealand Police, 2024). Youth crime is presented in New Zealand Ministry of Justice publications through percentages, averages, and total numbers. For example, "profile of youth justice FGC [family group conferences] in 2011 and 2012" (Spier & Wilkinson, 2016, p.1). Jackknife methods are used "to calculate for any bias and variance of estimate, without making any restrictive distributional assumptions" (Friedl & Stampfer, 2001, p.1) and imputation accounts are employed for any missing data. A T-test of the null hypothesis is assessed to see if there are any differences between the means of the two groups, paired alongside a rate ratio or f-test to calculate the variance of the rate ratio (Ali & Bhaskar, 2016). Modelling is completed through multiple standardisations: "reweighting technique to address the question", logic regression and multivariate analysis to account for strong predictors of victimisation/offence types, and the Gini coefficient summary of victimisation distribution producing a single statistic to show victimisation (New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 2020) are arranged to represent a trend and explain the number of youth engaging in youth justice between the years of 2011 and 2012 (Spier & Wilkinson, 2016).

Thorough analytical processes provide public information for researchers such as myself to utilise in my study. Statistical information has been used in my literature review to showcase the trends arising in youth crime to support literature towards my research questions. Despite using the information in this study, the statistical approach does not provide this thesis with the interactive aspect of analysing text in the media to identify the representations of youth. The statistics are factual information that describes what is shown through a rigorous compilation of data. Whereas a Foucauldian discourse approach allows the researcher to reflect on media texts and analyse the information according to power structures.

Discursive Psychology

Discursive psychology provides a tool to view the world through the social practices that are carried out by people. Through discursive psychology, these practices can include various texts both verbal and visual which are present in daily interactions amongst individuals. The practices are examined through the discursive lens to keep individuals accountable and analyse how they affect the social world (Wiggins, 2017). Discursive psychology has been associated with challenging mainstream psychology by seeking to "unpack, critique and respecify" (Button, 1991, p. 2). Wetherell (2015) views discursive psychology as being constructed by resources used by people (words, ideas) as these resources build accounts of the social world. The traditional resources used in discursive psychology now extend to written media texts analysing discourses present in social and cultural issues (Yang, 2021) as applied in the current study. Therefore, discursive psychology focuses on analysing these conversations of situated members and the discourses they present. Situated members of this study can include but are not limited to, political figures and the general public that engage in media articles about ram raiders contributing to discourses. The factuality of the descriptions is presented to dismiss alternative descriptions that are either discredited as weak or project objectivity to appeal to the individual's desires (Tileagă & Stokoe, 2018). As shown by Hansen Löfstrand (2009) the victim and villain narrative can arise with the public seeking the

discourse that aligns with them. There are three main areas of discursive methodology discussed in the section below to analyse and interpret the discourses of ram raiders in media.

What is a Discourse?

Before identifying the three main components of discursive analysis; a general understanding of what is defined as a discourse is elaborated. Discourses occur through conversations held by individuals in everyday life and formed into patterns in many social domains (Mills, 2004). There is a clear focus on the relationships between language and social context which is presented through organisation in texts, in this context media articles, that are applicable in social and cultural frameworks (Paltridge, 2012).

Burr (2015) explains discourse from a discursive psychology perspective as "an instance of situated language use. This is very often a conversation or other spoken interaction, but it can also be written texts of all kinds. Such spoken and written texts are analysed by discursive psychologists to examine the way that language is used in building successful accounts for the speaker or writer. The question underlying such analysis is typically one of process; the aim is to make visible how certain representations of events or persons are being achieved" (p.1). This study uses the written aspect of news media to explore the discourses and identify the representations of ram raiders.

The term discourse may vary across different analysis methods as Willig (2008) suggests:

> discursive psychology asks how participants use language in order to negotiate and manage social interactions so as to achieve interpersonal objectives (e.g. disclaim an undesirable social identity, justify an action, attribute blame). Foucauldian discourse analysis seeks to describe and critique the discursive worlds people inhabit and to explore their implications for subjectivity and experience (e.g. what is it like to be positioned as 'asylum seeker' and what kind of actions and experiences are compatible with such a positioning?) (p.96).

Discourses are explored further in their subsequent analysis methods in this chapter to highlight their applicability according to the specified approach.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis examines patterns that can be applied in interdisciplinary approaches. To provide a more streamlined definition of discourse analysis - it is forming a theory through the analysis of verbal communication, language, and other various forms of speech or visual text (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2004). In recent definitions, visual texts are expanded to articles presented in the media that construct discourses (Yang, 2021). The information can be analysed through a micro or macro lens and is viewed in relationships created on political, social, and cultural institutions. The effects language may have on a global level and how structures through language are created in the masses are examined (Dong & To, 2021; Gee, 2014).

Discourse analysis has many advantages such as providing an insight into the language used in various contexts. For instance, discourse analysis can be used multimodally which considers texts that are presented in other forms such as words and graphics by providing meaning to them (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The language used in media can be analysed to depict the further meaning of what is presented for ram raiders. Amongst the meanings, there exist different ideologies that may shape the language used for reporting on the behaviours of young offenders. The approach also highlights the improvements that can be made in our communication and overall provides individuals with tools that can help them communicate more effectively. It is favoured by psychologists as it provides them with a tool to problematize categories within psychology to deconstruct various themes such as prejudice etc (Paltridge, 2012). For young ram raiders, these tools can be utilised to understand whether there are any preconceived notions about the representation of these young people as negative ideologies can be harmful to future consequences (Sandøy et al., 2022).

By being able to deconstruct these categories, researchers can find alternative methods to customary norms associated with the category (Willig, 1999). Discourse analysis can be used as a

source of empowerment for marginalised groups as it explores strategies for them. Rather than providing top-down interventions, the strategies are applied within the masses by working with organisations that can help support such changes. For the young ram raiders who are identified to be between the years of 13 to 17 years old (Chambers, 2022); a discourse analysis can identify strategies applicable to reducing reoffending in this group of youth.

Discourse analysis can also be used to understand the changing cultural and social norms by studying the evolution of society from different periods and how language has changed according to this. Interdisciplinary fields are part of discourse analysis as the approach allows material to be drawn from all disciplines for a broader picture (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2004).

To use a discourse analysis approach, there is a high level of analytic skill required to carry out the investigation. The materials used in discourse analysis are subjective to the individual's interpretation of the text and can lead to understanding the text differently (Johnstone & Andrus, 2024). As suggested by Wetherell and Potter (1988) the analytical schema a researcher may be working with could be revised over the course of the study or discarded completely as the evidence does not meet the criteria. There is a level of skill required by the researcher to create an analytical order in the texts used that may be contradictory. This especially becomes problematic when the researcher is unable to capture the missing voices or silence in the text and requires a higher level of awareness of the social, political and cultural trends that texts may refer to (Gee, 2014; Gill, 2000). The current study notes that media articles will include a variety of writers and speakers who will present opinions contributing to the discourses of ram raiders with some narratives being absent from the articles further expanding on certain discourses. Researchers' biases in the study are accounted for by recognising personal experiences that can create their assumptions within this study.

Discourse analysts have argued that discourses shape the world and are also shaped by it in the process (Mills, 2004; Paltridge, 2012). Being able to identify common themes and relationships

between concepts allows for a good discourse analysis to take place and find a deeper meaning to the worldviews of individuals (Johnstone, 2008). A concept that can be replicated in the current study by identifying a theme that is connected to the representation of ram raiders, especially by addressing the marginalisation they may experience through labels. However, the study requires an approach that highlights the power structures present in media institutions that may contribute to the discourses created for ram raiders. Discourse analysis does not allow for institutional power relationships to be explored and would not provide the current study with the framework to assess aspects of authority and control from media discourses.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis differs from discourse analysis as it shifts between analysing texts, interactions, and social contexts of varying forms (Fairclough et al., 2001; Farrelly et al., 2020). It focuses on the relationship between power, dominance, and discrimination through the form of language available in texts such as media. The critical aspect of critical discourse analysis is specific to the social interactions that take place between language and society and the practices associated with them (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Van Dijk, 2015). Theorists of critical discourse analysis describe that the critical aspect that sets it apart from discourse analysis is the ability to view the data embedded in the social context and specifically being able to take a political stance on the matter (Farrelly et al., 2020; Locke, 2004). A critical discourse approach would analyse the media articles distributed to citizens and highlight the discourses that arise for ram raiders through a political understanding.

Although critical discourse analysis widely uses language, some researchers consider "semiosis - meaning-making through language, body language, visual images, or any other way of signifying" (Fairclough et al., 2001, p.229). Semiosis connects diverse social practices and how they interact dialectically. The theoretical origins of critical discourse analysis can be derived from the Western Marxism language which also explores the social context and the exploitation created

culturally. This can be extended to other sociologists such as Gramsci who highlight the term hegemony which refers to power struggles and the influence of elites eventually sustaining their ideologies to the masses (Fairclough et al., 2001; Van Dijk, 2015). This can be recognised in the current study through political figureheads that present their ideologies to the public and introduce discourses about ram raiders. Hence, highlighting the politicians as the elites that endorse certain ideologies towards the masses.

Discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis differ as the critical approach investigates the relationship of power present in the language and the struggle present within the discourse to highlight the dominant groups (Wodak and Meyer, 2016). The unethical issues that oppress a group of individuals through discursive injustices are ultimately discovered through a critical discourse analysis lens. It emphasises the discursive theme present within the interdisciplinary approach and how it can be effectively interpreted for certain people (Ramanathan & Hoon, 2015). Critical discourse analysis explores the social power embedded within the reoccurring social practices emulated through discourses and actions. An area that Michel Foucault (1977) popularised by exploring practices through discourses. However, critical discourse analysis uses semiotic media such as images to provide detailed explanations, rather than Foucault's descriptions of speaking and thinking which are more relevant to the current study. Critical discourse analysis becomes appealing to researchers who appreciate a systematic approach to sociocultural studies as it works well within texts and scripts (Johnstone, 2008). The ability to identify social wrongdoings in society and provide an analysis of how the issue could be resolved for the betterment of people is a beneficial element of critical discourse analysis. The analysis of discourse can be applied to reality and provide evidence to create policies that can change the political makeup. Furthermore, critical discourse analysis reduces the polarization of social media and provides context without any impartiality (Fairclough, 2013). Although determining better outcomes for young people engaging in ram raids is favourable, this study analyses the discourses leading to the representation of ram raids and the consequences they face through media institutions.

Michael Billig (2002) questions whether critical discourse analysis has become uncritical as the analysis looks towards excluding the outsiders and mystifies the intentions of the overall analysis. Billig (2002) further probes critical discourse analysis by expressing that the theory requires critique and suggests marketisation. An example of critical discourse analysis is being taught in universities by lecturers who are part of an institution, yet encourage their students to discuss terms of inequality by trying to empower the silenced voices. However, egalitarianism is limited as lecturers are operating in an unequal environment as they are the ones grading students' work, with higher grades leading students to enrol in the paper and benefit the university. A parallel can be drawn between writers of media institutions that encourage articles on ram raiders from various perspectives. The material distributed to audiences is consistently determined by institutions that increase their readership. Therefore, this study would benefit from exploring the institutional power of creating discourses through the techniques of various narratives.

Whereas, Forchtner (2014) suggests an explicit incorporation of narrative analysis whilst using a critical discourse approach, especially in researching historically significant texts. Researchers should be wary of the inherent perspectives and reconstructions of historical material being analysed as the context and time the material had been written may be reflective of certain narratives, whilst missing the narratives of others such as marginalised groups. Such as referring to 9 November 1989 as the fall of the wall of Berlin as the past events do not dictate their representation presently. Researchers are to be aware of selective narration and the manipulation of some texts as the interpretation of information in a limited context is used to block off alternative narratives (Fairclough, 2013). The semiotic aspect of critical discourse analysis can provide a social issue as the discourse-related problem identified in the social world or the representation of social practices may be dependent on the varying interactions of the individuals (Forchtner, 2014; Wodak et al., 2014). Given the current research examines media articles over five years, the representations of ram raiders may vary across the years per the narration of their behaviour from multiple perspectives.

The critical discourse analysis perspective identifies the relationship between discourse and power. The addition of reflecting on ideologies that may be formed through discourses as a result of hegemonic power is recognised in the production of labels towards ram raiders. However, Foucauldian discourse approaches seem to align better with the study as they allude to the social power present in practices as a result of discourses. Foucault examines the power exerted by institutions in the form of discourses that harness social control. It is understood in this thesis that *ram raids* are a constructed label that connects with sources and structures of power. However, the institutions that control that power are to be examined in the study and are a better fit for the Foucauldian discourse approach.

Foucauldian Discourse Theory

Michel Foucault has influenced discourse analysis theories with his research which has included the concepts of power, knowledge, and truth. Foucault suggests in his research that a subject is either one that is subject to or subjugates power (Foucault, 1980). He analyses the relationship of power relations through resistance and the concept of oppositions involving power. For example, men hold power over women and how that defines their commonality. These examples are where the formation of power is showcased for the status of the individual against the "government of individuals" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983 p. 212).

Foucault does not view discourses in conventional ways and has associated discourse with concepts that do not just identify with linguistic or grammatical language. McHoul and Grace (2015) state that Foucault's discourse theory focuses on discipline. Discipline refers to two entities such as scholarly disciplines (science, psychiatry, sociology etc.) and institutions that hold a control element, such as the education, prisons, and healthcare systems, with media institutions being specific to the current study. Foucault explores discourses amongst the relationships between disciplines that provide knowledge, and the disciplinary practices that provide social control (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011; McHoul & Grace, 2015).

Foucault has key concepts of power, resistance, the body, social science, social agents and the clinicalisation of social control which is central to his perspective on discourse analysis (Powers, 2003). He suggests that these concepts combine to provide direction to everyday lives and influence society as a whole, often referred to by Foucault as power or knowledge (Foucault, 2002). Foucault uses a constructionist approach to derive the meaning of social actions and practices through the lens of power relations (Khan & MacEachen, 2021). He described discourse as "practices which form the object of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49) and refers to not only linguistic material but to any material that includes a statement (Foucault, 1972; Mills, 2004, p.15). Referring to Foucault's quote, discourse cannot be analysed in isolation (Mills, 2004). Foucault does not adhere to the real representation of the discourse but how systematically the influences work to produce dominant discourses in society through institutions. Foucault's ideas developed over time as he focused on the relations between humans and discourses. His research questioned whether humans as individuals are only significant as they are products of the created discourses. He stated that individuals would disappear should it not be for discourses as humans are understood through the discourses that are produced about them at any given time. Therefore essentially describes that discourses are changing when new knowledge is discovered through practices and the direction the new discourse will lead (Gaurav, 2021).

Furthermore, Foucault's theories discovered that statements do not equate to units of discourses but are rather governed by the rules of their functioning. Statements are justified through historical knowledge and are not subject to traditional rules of language with power governing their function (McHoul & Grace, 2015). Foucauldian discourse analysis associates power as a key element. Foucault refers to the complexity of power and his term repressive hypothesis describes power as not belonging to a privileged group or hindering individuals from carrying out their wishes due to lack of freedom; rather power for Foucault is present in social relations which forms behaviours that lead to either liberating or restricting behaviours. He views literature published by institutions within the process of exclusion as it produces discourses that support the circulation of the material to

maintain power (Mills, 2004). Foucault suggests discourses in certain structures such as being part of an educational institution will label the person as intelligent. Further structures such as the educational grading system, validate this discourse. However, these discourses can vary over time depending on the various discourses present within that period (Wiggins, 2017). We can see that discourses are present in the daily lives of individuals with politics being an imminent part. The connection between discourse and politics can be seen through the power and the positions created for subjects within the political sphere (McHoul & Grace, 2015). Foucault's term *governmentality* which refers to government rationality becomes the foundation of distinctive rules that form modern politics. His research critiques the government for individualising issues in an attempt to exercise their power thus creating further discourses (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014).

Foucauldian discourse analyses the agency of individuals through the way they are being constantly shaped by the discourses present in their daily lives and the choices they make as a result of these discourses. Therefore, Foucauldian analysis of the discourses, allows individuals to contemplate different choices attached to the present discourses. The theory shows a relationship between a text identified as a discourse towards wider social issues can have meaning in a broader sense rather than just its daily portrayal (Wiggins, 2017). For example, by using text in the media which may be explicitly stating a message such as gun violence is bad (discourse). Upon further Foucauldian analysis, the discourses presented in media may strike conversations relating to changes in policies and discussing the effect of gun violence in communities.

Hook (2001) criticises the theory as they state that Foucault's perspective on discourse is much more situated to knowledge and power than to language. Foucault focuses on discourse as knowledge occurs isolated to the sphere of the discourse it is presented in (political, social, historical) and whether the statements are true or false. Hook (2001) claims that there is only reference to the text being analysed and not the wider discursive processes or description of what constitutes knowledge. Other theorists have further criticised the analysis as not being able to

identify actors within the wider institution (Khan & MacEachen, 2021; Vighi & Feldner, 2007). Critical discourse analysis refutes Foucault's theory by stating that discourses are not cohesive therefore social reality is difficult to determine, as actors can be part of multiple discourses in which they play multiple roles (Fairclough, 1992, p.72). Discourse analysts using Foucauldian theories need to recognise the conceptualisations of power and resistance to identify the discourse within them (Powers, 2003).

Approach for the Study: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Despite the many advantages identified for discourse and critical discourse analysis, there are shortcomings in the theories that do not align with the current study. Discourse analysis has an interdisciplinary approach; the assumption seems to factor in only the representation of language and the material associated with it. There seems to be a simplified version of interpreting the representation of language and material which does not account for the relationship power and knowledge from the actors may play in the discourse. Whilst, critical discourse analysis incorporates the position of power within its theory; it focuses on the ideologies that are present in a communicative event. Critical discourse analysis focuses on the ideologies of the dominant groups who produce discursive practices and has been criticised by researchers for marketisation (Billig, 2002). Whereas, Foucauldian discourse analysis has power relations at the centre of its approach. The main difference is that critical discourse analysis is recommended for hegemonic ideologies in language present in society; Foucauldian discourse analysis can explore languages' ability to create structures in reality through the relation of power in discourses (Liao & Markula, 2009).

Foucauldian discourse analysis examines various disciplines and the power held within institutions associated with various disciplines (McHoul & Grace, 2015). Foucault's approach exposes the societal norms that are accepted by society and the power relations that led them to become the dominant discourse. Foucault has identified dominant discourses that can arise within these disciplines such as the healthcare system where health experts hold power to marginalise others.

Foucault's approach challenges healthcare experts' authoritative stance and can question their practices which may be hindering patients (Boulton et al., 2021). For example, the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons diagnoses small breasts as a disease regardless of having finished the natural development stages. Discourses allow female breasts to be compared to the norms set by healthcare professionals; whilst providing options such as plastic surgery to achieve the norm (Cheek & Porter, 1997).

Discursive psychology tends to draw on the participants' use of language and how they use it to navigate social interactions to achieve certain objectives. Foucauldian discourse analysis, on the other hand, critiques the discourse presented in social structures and the experiences and subjectivity of individuals (Willig, 2008).

The Foucauldian discourse approach takes into account the role of institutions and the power they have to produce ideologies that are replicated as discourses to which society is subjugated (Willig, 2013). Therefore, it is a feasible approach for this thesis as it will examine the role of media as an institution that holds power and the discourses it produces for the masses. The theory will provide a framework for the thesis to discover the various discourses produced and how that is implemented into society about ram raiders.

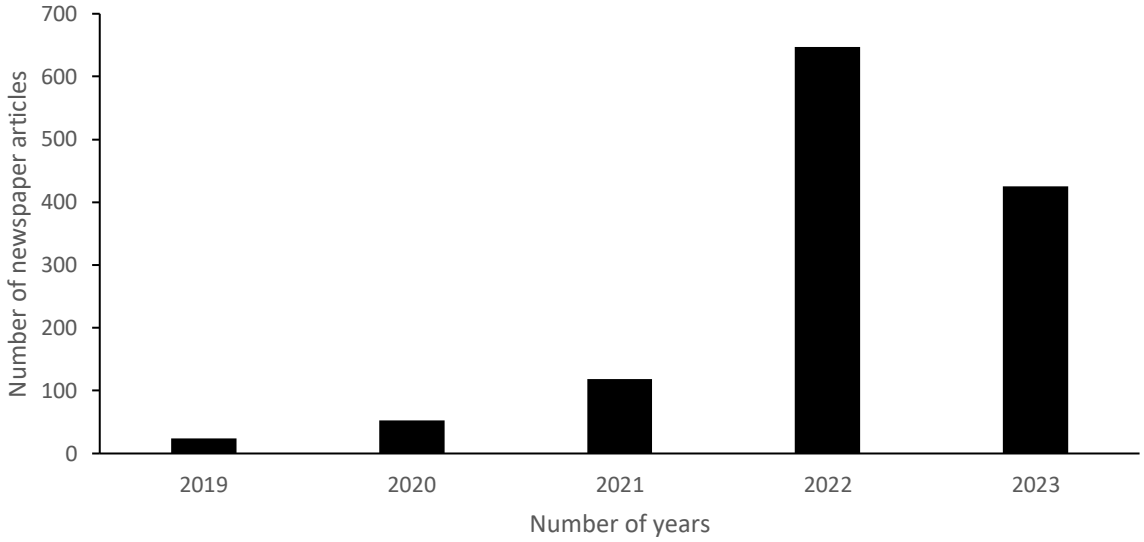
Data Collection

The study has used a Foucauldian discourse approach to analyse news media articles of youth ram raiders in New Zealand. Statistical evidence shows youth crime decreasing as ram raids continue to be controversial in the media. This study will examine the news articles that have used the term ram raids with Foucauldian discourse analysis as the underlying approach. The data was collected through the *Newztext* database which contains news stories from a variety of New Zealand media sources. It is a research tool that archives and updates news publications by various newspapers, magazines and other mainstream current affairs publications. The keywords used in the first search included *ram raids* and variants (i.e., *ram raids*, *ram raider/s*) with additional search

terms (with the checked required box) using the keyword *youth*. The dates were narrowed between 1 October 2019 to 1 October 2023 to examine the rise of youth ram raids within the past five years. The search results showed 1249 documents that matched the keywords and an increase of newspaper articles with the keywords from 2019 (24) to 2023 (402). The number of articles published with the keywords is shown in Figure 4. There were 199 articles from *The New Zealand Herald* across the five years that mentioned both keywords. The 199 media reports were analysed per the analytical framework and were reduced to 69 articles as presented in Table 5 to identify the arising themes.

Figure 4

Frequency of Newspaper Articles with the Keyword 'Ram Raid' and 'Youth', 2019-2023



Note. The data in the figure was derived from the information on the *Newztext* database through the University of Waikato website.

Table 5

Number of Reports in New Zealand Herald Over Five Years

New Zealand Herald	Number of articles
2019	*1*
2020	*0*
2021	*0*
2022	*46*
2023	*22*
Total	*69*

Criteria for Selecting Newspapers

Article selection criteria

The newspaper articles were selected through *Newztext* by selecting the *Newspapers and Newswires criteria* on the search sections. The selection criteria of the newspaper articles were that they engaged with the keywords ram raids and youth and contributed to the overall reporting of ram raids. Table 6 shows that there are a number of different sources in *Newztext* that have reported on articles with the keywords ram raids and youth.

However, articles with the keywords were only chosen from *The New Zealand Herald* to provide consistency across the articles. The New Zealand Herald engages more than 2.2 million New Zealanders every week with an online presence growing from 140,000 readers (NZME, 2022). With the large number of audience members engaging in the material, especially with the keywords youth and ram raids as shown in Table 6. The paper abides by the editorial code of conduct and ethics which is divided into eight areas including accuracy, independence, opinion, editing, diversity, conduct/integrity, complementary codes/principals, and scope. To expand on the codes, this refers to publishing articles with impartial views inclusive of the headlines and captions to reflect the

accuracy and the content of the article or image. The New Zealand Herald website refers to their headlines as “headline writing is an art and will be treated with the same care and responsibility as the body of the article. They should neither be dull nor misleading” (NZ Herald, 2023, para. 7). There is mention of differentiating between opinion articles in the New Zealand Herald online publications, which they depict as providing freedom of expression, speech, and press. However, unlike social media, the website states it adheres to the media council’s rules and upholds them to provide an opinion without reinforcing negative stereotypes but invoking safe debates on issues such as race and gender (NZ Herald, 2023).

The researcher has not used sources such as *Te Awamutu Courier, Waikato Times*, and other agencies as they have a smaller number of reports with the keywords and a smaller readership as shown in Table 6. The researcher also takes into account that several other sources have reported the keywords more often, such as *Stuff* and *Radio New Zealand Newswire*. It is acknowledged that the wide coverage of the source, the dependability of the New Zealand population on the source, and the code of ethics the newspaper is subjected to; are reasons why The New Zealand Herald was selected as the main source for the current study. The key factor is that a widely read publication is an indication of the influence on public discourses it may hold which smaller publications may not reach. There are a large number of articles available for the years selected, especially for 2022 and 2023 with a number of the same incidents reported in multiple newspaper articles. These articles were accounted for as the *Newztext* platform hid the duplicated searches and discarded any repeated articles.

Table 6

Frequency of Reports Per News Outlet Over Five Years with the Keywords 'Ram Raids' and 'Youth' (2019-2023)

	Number of Reports				
Source	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Te Awamutu Courier	1		3	3	
Whanganui Chronicle	1		1	29	31
The Northern Advocate	2	2	2	47	30
The Daily Post		5	9	52	39
The Press	3	3	7	17	10
Stuff	3	12	33	109	51
Scoop	2	3	5	58	51
Radio New Zealand	2	6	10	90	50
The Northland Age				6	1
The New Zealand Herald	3	3	8	91	94
Hawkes Bay Today/ Bay of Plenty Times		1	3	74	63
Otago Daily Times	4				
Hauraki Coromandel Post			1	1	
NZ C				12	
Waikato Times		4	9	17	
Taupo Weekender		2			
Manawatu Standard		2	7	9	
The Timaru Herald		2	4	7	
Sunday Star Times		3			
Taranaki Daily News		2	5	10	

Kapiti News		1	5
Spinoff			2
The Southland Times	4	6	5
Marlborough Express		4	3

Apparatus

NVivo was used as the sole research tool in this study to assist with data findings. The tool is computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software for analysing and reporting data. NVivo is traditionally utilised by qualitative and mixed-method researchers (Dhakal, 2022). However, discourse analysis studies (Araujo et al., 2018; Dong & To, 2021) have used NVivo as their research tool which allows for an array of qualitative designs and analytical approaches to be carried out. There has been commentary on qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo not being a sufficient coding system for discourse analysis as it causes the software to dominate method behaviour and compromises the agency of the researcher. However, the misconceptions have been negated as studies show systems such as NVivo allow for researchers to make sense of the processes around data analysis by making it more transparent (Paulus et al., 2015).

Analytical Framework

Whilst enlisting an analytical framework for the study, the researcher has studied Parker's (2013) text *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology* where a 20-step discourse analysis framework is identified. The steps range from the selection of text (steps 1 and 2) to identifying objects and subjects in the text (steps 3-12) and examining discourses that show power relations within the text (steps 13-20). Parker's (2013) framework provides a detailed description of analysing discourses and their relationship within the wider political sphere and the social effects it may lead to. However, the researcher chose to focus on frameworks that would engage with more robust Foucauldian methods.

Therefore, two Foucauldian approaches were analysed for this study. It is acknowledged that both these approaches have used Parker's (2013) framework to create their analytical approaches (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011; Willig, 2008). The framework presented by Willig (2008) which includes six stages and allows the researcher to explore discourses in texts and the position of subjects within them. Stages 1 and 2 refer to finding the discourses within the text and identifying the discourse in multiple ways. Stage 1 focuses on finding a discourse that aligns with the research question either presented in implicit or explicit ways. This allows the researcher to investigate discourses that the text may not directly reference, which in itself can outline how the object is being constructed in the text. Stage 2 further examines the identified object in the text and how it can lead to multiple discourse constructions in a wider discursive setting. The researcher can use stage 2 to understand that the identified discourse may be presented in the text to wider discourses. Stage 3 refers to what the wider discourses can achieve from the objects being presented in a particular way. The researcher uses stage 3 to weigh the actions of the various constructions of the discourse and what it may achieve by being presented in a certain form in the text. As the previous stages have identified the discourse in multiple forms and the impact of it in wider discourses; stage 4 draws in on the subjects participating in the discourse and their relative positioning. Discourse analysts use stage 4 to identify the subjects, their position within networks, and their perspectives and speech on the discourse. Stage 5 discusses the relationship between discourse and practice. The role of subject positions in discursive constructions can lead to actions and the construction of various versions of the world. Researchers can link the relationship between subject positions and discourses to the actions that lead to legitimised practices in the wider society. This leads analysts to see how discourses created in the text have led to actions in the world. Stage 6 explores the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. Researchers understand the experiences and thoughts of the subject positions and the realities they can create.

Despite Willig (2008) providing a comprehensive framework for analysing discourses within texts. The researcher has sought Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2011) as the underlying framework

for the current study as it adheres to the governmentality and subjectification aspects of Foucauldian discourse analysis. As shown in Table 7, the framework created by Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2011) comprises five components in their analytical framework. The first component draws focus on selecting a corpus of statements with historic dimensions to account for answers that can show historic variability. The researcher can discuss temporal variability in their study as presentations of the subject can be shown over a period of time to expose changing forms of regulation and reform. Foucauldian analysis favours discontinuity over continuity to show the transformation of discourses through time in various institutions. There is an internal validity that is sought from statements to form the conditions of possibility of diverse discursive practices. During this stage, the researcher used the selection criteria on *Newztext* to isolate the number of articles into five different years (2019-2023) and the presence of the keywords in the articles. The newspaper *The New Zealand Herald* was identified as the main source. Each article was then read through to identify the keywords and basis of the articles from 199 articles to 63 articles to create the main corpus of the study.

Problematization was the second step in the analysis which discussed how discursive practices and objects can become problematic, leading to a visible issue to the masses. The intersections of various discourses show knowledge and power relations. The researcher can create their view on the relation this may possess to the research and understand the connection of discourse and how it may be governed. In this study, the researcher identified the problems by using NVivo to create codes that outline certain themes in the articles used. The dominant discourses were identified as the keywords that were used more often. Whilst the counter-discourses hold an antagonistic relationship with dominant discourses and can be easily subjugated (Heracleous, 2006). These were identified as the keywords that were not promoted as often by The New Zealand Herald but were still present in the articles. Despite ram raids being presented as a crime problem, the researcher questions whether there are other elements such as a moral dilemma or social panic on where the future of our youth is headed and the safety of one's community from ram raids.

This leads us to technologies, step three of the analytical framework which refers to the governmentality of self and others. Foucault (1988) speaks to technologies as humans seeking knowledge of themselves in the form of a critical inquiry. The Foucauldian discourse approach uses the technology of power and self to understand that power can act as a technology to govern humans, and the self is the power exercised by technology that leads individuals to regulate themselves. In this study, the newspaper which is part of an institution exerts power on individuals to govern human conduct. Humans interact with the newspaper to engage in conversations to seek knowledge about themselves which could affect their lives. Therefore people become subject positions (step four) in these conversations within an institutional structure such as the newspaper. Subject positions use the same description in this framework as Willig's (2008), in which people in a structure hold rights for those that use that repertoire (Davies & Harre, 1999, p.35). The subjects that engage in the conversations presented in the newspaper can provide their perspective from their moral location. They become technologies for speaking the truth according to their moral order. The researcher established the different subject positions present under the different codes in the programme by analysing the language used by authors to present the narrative. The language that presented inclusion and exclusion criteria showed *us* and *them* rhetoric, in addition to racialised and stereotyped undertones that were used to form subjects that either held power based on institutionalised positions or were subjected to it (Wodak, 2008). The questions that arose for the researcher centred around which roles held power and in which context were the articles presented. The articles were further examined around the institutional roles, gender, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, class, and language of the groups present in the articles. For example, there were multiple articles from political leaders and government officials regarding the behaviour of youth ram raiders and how that spoke from their moral position. Whilst, the voice of ram raiders that were not explicitly present and were spoken about in predominantly exclusionary terms were still acknowledged as subjects.

The last step in the analysis pertains to the subjectification of ethics formed through self-formation. The subjects interacting with technologies produced through power and self are dominated by acts of subjection to meet a moral order that adheres with those they share a moral universe. In the study, the subjects that were identified into inclusionary and exclusionary groups were divided into further groups of which moral universe they share and how that has led to the actions of the subject members. Identifying representations and consequences for young people engaging in ram raids through discursive practices.

Table 7

Key Concepts of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011)

Concept	Essential idea
Selecting a corpus	Foucauldian discourse analysis selected texts based on the social practices they give rise to, documents associated with governmental practices, a variety of speeches in various settings, and autobiographical aspects of conversations to access the continuity of time.
Problematizations	Discursive object to establish relation to the present and break down how these certainties may relate to oneself. The analyst may pose questions regarding the moral judgements that lead humans as problematic and how official discourses and counter-discourses may be visible and intelligible. A further problematization is drawn upon when the material questions the practices which allow humans to manage and govern with these discourses in mind.
Technologies	Technologies are like 'truth games' where individuals can engage with the conflicts and power in the conversation on a political scale or locally.
Subject Positions	The analyst is able to analyse cultural constructs of discourses available to speakers.
Subjectification	The regulation of the individual may be dependent on the moral universe they share with others and how their actions lead to transforming them into a state of perfection accepted by all.

Personal Statement

Reflexivity is an important aspect of discourse analysis-based studies described by Morris and Peterson (1994) as being able to offer new routes of theorising and analysing data on various topics including political and social issues. The absence of reflexivity can lead to biases created in studies which can compromise the overall results; whilst these biased claims can lead to forming discourses present in the political world they refer to. The presence of reflexivity places accountability on the researchers to conduct their studies with neutrality as the information in their studies is reflected in social structures (Alejandro, 2020). As a researcher examining discourses through my study, I must assess the biases I hold through my experiences and how that may reflect on my study. I acknowledge that complete reflexivity is unable to be attained within a study. However, I will explain my worldview in this section for audience members to understand my outlook on the world and how it concerns this study.

My experience in research is sparse as I have previously engaged in a directed study paper to conduct a qualitative study that examined the effect of traumatic brain injuries in children of the Pasifika community. The paper initially required me to conduct interviews with children and their caregivers to discuss their experiences of traumatic brain injuries within the New Zealand healthcare system. As the study was being completed midst the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview process was unable to be completed and the study was restructured to a literature review, method section, and reflection on my learnings and challenges of completing a qualitative study during COVID-19. There are vast differences between my directed study paper and the current study including the subject and I was unable to conduct any analysis on the subject being studied. Therefore, this thesis required me to learn new skills including understanding the Foucauldian psychological lens and discursive psychology. My research allowed me to critically evaluate texts and analyse material and language to uncover their role in social reality.

Given my study includes themes of the criminal justice system and youth offending; as the researcher, I understand that I contribute as a subject/social agent to the positioning and reproducing of certain discourses throughout my life (Alejandro, 2020). Therefore, I would like to acknowledge that I am currently working at Ara Poutama (Department of Corrections) psychological services as a reintegration coordinator within Auckland Regional Women's Correctional Facility. Additionally, I have had experience as a Bail Support Officer and Senior Practitioner within the community side of Ara Poutama and have managed youth pre-sentencing and community-based sentences. I have worked with youth who have participated in ram raids and have worked alongside Oranga Tamariki to support them. The number of youth that I supported were predominantly from Pasifika and/or Māori ethnic backgrounds and lived in South Auckland, predominantly, Manurewa, Otara, and Mangere. I am a person of Pasifika Indian heritage and have grown up in Papatoetoe, South Auckland. My schooling has been through public schools within the South Auckland area and have experienced the struggles of living within a low socioeconomic community. In addition to my experiences, I have completed my undergraduate degrees in psychology, sociology, and gender studies. The discussions throughout my undergraduate papers provided an academic understanding of my experiences as I was able to attribute certain inequalities within my community with theories.

I acknowledge that I have been exposed to mainstream media which attributes criminals as belonging to lower socioeconomic backgrounds and of Pasifika and Māori ethnicities. My childhood experiences, academic background, and professional roles lead me to believe that information presented through media institutions such as television news reporting, newspapers, and social media can be a product of clickbait-type material. I hold the worldview that the communities, individuals, and youth offenders I have engaged with over the years hold a more intricate series of factors that has led to their behaviour, rather than the publications that are created to increase readership. The biases I hold are towards large institutions such as newspaper outlets that can influence the masses and social and political agendas. As I belong to the community that is often linked in newspaper articles to gang violence and shootings (Block, 2023), my rhetoric is of us rather

than them. I empathise with the youth offenders as I have lived and worked alongside them. Therefore, the discussions in this thesis may allude to my preconceptions of newspapers damaging the reputation of certain communities through otherization and oppression.

Ethical Considerations

This study did not require ethics approval from the ethics committee as it examined discourses of young ram raiders through newspaper articles in New Zealand media. However, this study adhered to the *New Zealand Psychological Society of Code of Ethics* (2002) standards. The code of ethics states to upkeep psychological ethical practices and follow the ethical principles outlined. The researcher notes that the ethical principles of responsible caring, integrity in relationships, respect for the dignity of persons and people, and social justice and responsibility to society have been taken into consideration while conducting the study. Despite the study being archival and participants were not engaged, it is acknowledged that there are people and communities represented in the research that are portrayed in the utmost respect.

This study comprises discursive approaches to young people classed as a vulnerable group of individuals that are associated with offending behaviour. Moore and Miller (1999) describe young offenders as “doubly vulnerable” (p. 1034) due to their age and reporting them as offenders making them susceptible to marginalisation. The complexities of other factors such as biological (Steinberg, 2008), social (Ogilvie et al., 2014), and systemic (Hackman et al., 2021) factors contribute to challenges for ethical depictions within discursive research of young offenders. The researcher acknowledges that racial disparities presented in media articles (Bull, 2017) can lead to prejudices for ram raiders and othering of this group (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Brown, 2010). The thesis understands that discursive representations of youth ram raiders construct their identity for the masses and lead to consequences as a result (McAlister & Carr, 2014). Thus, the study attempts to highlight present discourses in media through various narratives and the power structures in place. The findings are sensitively produced while recognising the presence and absence of certain

narratives that create discourses. The researcher discusses ethnic disparities, outgroups, moral panics, and associations with other groups such as gangs within media texts to understand the representation of young people as ram raiders. Furthermore, consequential outcomes of such representations are explored to emphasise institutional power held by the media.

Chapter Four: Results

Using a Foucauldian discourse approach, this chapter presents the results which reveal dominant and competing discourses present in New Zealand popular media accounts about *ram raiders*. Data from the study has highlighted four discourses present in the study which will be further articulated in this chapter. In summary, the identified discourses concern:

- *Criminality*. The position of the subjects and the language of the authors were analysed to view how the term is understood in media.
- *Moral Panic*. Youth are positioned as having a moral dilemma.
- *'Us vs. Them'*. Where a prevailing narrative deploys othering and stereotyping practices towards young people.
- *Victims of violence.*

The identified discourses will be presented and discussed in turn.

Discourse I: Ram Raiders as *Criminals*

The resurgence of the term ram raids seems to have become synonymous with words such as policing (436 counts), crimes (358 counts) and offending (343 counts) by the New Zealand Herald. It has constructed a narrative of ram raiders in their newspaper as individuals carrying out ram raids for the "fun" of it all (Leask, 2019, para 69). The youth ram raiders are presented as a group of adolescents who are conducting criminal activities and are accredited as offenders for their antics. Whilst, the general New Zealand population are positioned as victims. The New Zealand Herald is part of a powerful institution that can use their influence to distribute their narrative in the media accessed by millions of New Zealanders. The criminal discourse was identified as dominant as it juxtaposed the moral panic discourse which is explored further in this section. The following presents article excerpts that highlight the criminal discourse of ram raiders with excerpts from the position of three subjects: *victims, the public, and politicians*. The language of the subjects has been

analysed to show the problematizations caused by the term ram raiders and the technologies used to interact with the subjects on a political level.

This section begins with analysing the framing of ram raiders as youth offenders. It highlights multiple excerpts to understand if correlations are formed with other groups such as gang members. Additionally, the positioning of audience members is explored to recognise their moral locations.

> The claim from Nationals police spokesman, Mark Mitchell, comes as a crime wave continues across Auckland. Ram raids have increased by more than 500 per cent for the first six months of 2022 compared to the same period in 2018, according to police statistics. Some big retailers such as Michael Hill have been hit multiple times by thieves. The median age of those identified or caught across 129 ram raids since May this year was just 15 years old. Mitchell believes that, although some of these youth offenders steal for themselves, most are connected to senior gang operations. “Without a doubt, these youth offenders are heavily influenced by the adult gangs,” Mitchell said. “They’re well-planned, they know exactly what they’re after, they execute it well and they have a getaway car ready to go”. Within hours they are melting down the gold, they are removing the diamonds and there's a market that has been created for that through the adult gang network. (Kinnear, 2022, para. 2)

> Ram raids are up by 500 per cent. We have seen a halving of youth prosecutions, he said. Luxon said at least 10 percent of the types of ram-raid offences were through patched gang members or associates and gangs were looking attractive for vulnerable people. (Orsman, 2022, para. 6)

> For example, 20 percent of all recent ram raids were in the Waikato. Gang membership in the Waikato is up 70 per cent over the past five years and gangs are recruiting nearly three times faster than Police. “Enough is enough”, Luxon said. (Morton, 2022, para. 30)

The connection between ram raiders and gang members has been highlighted in the excerpts above. The narrative provides an understanding that youth conducting ram raids are not just delinquent teenagers, but a group of individuals that are partaking in organised crime. Problematizations are created by framing the issue for readers that ram raids are not just caused by delinquent children but are a product of targeted criminal activity caused by gangs. The statistics used in both excerpts "500 per cent…" (Orsman, 2022, para. 6) and "Ram raids are up by 500 per cent" (Orsman, 2022, para. 6) are repeated to emphasise the imminent threat of ram raids increasing in current times. Whilst the link between 15 year old ram raiders choosing to interact with gang members poses moral questions for individuals engaging with the article, and allows them to view youth ram raiders as gang members rather than children. The correlation created in excerpt three between the ram raids in Waikato and the increasing gang membership further encourages readers to associate youth ram raiders with gang members which may lead to harsher crimes in the future. The position of the speakers in the articles is of political leaders as Foucault (2008) suggests that they are in a position of power presenting statistical evidence that is reached by the masses. Their position makes them and their information more trustworthy as public figureheads. The rhetoric at the end of the last excerpt by Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, "enough is enough" (Morton, 2022, para. 30) can be viewed as an endorsement of the problem of ram raids and gang membership and enlisting other subject positions to align with their morals. Furthermore, the Prime Minister's position as an authority figure can be interpreted as speaking on behalf of frustrated and fearful citizens by drawing a line in the sand. The criminal discourse is further present in articles as youth ram raiders cause disruptions in society accredited to social media accolades and fun.

> The children and youths behind the ram-raid rampage of 2022 learned about violence in their homes and were partly driven by the fun of it, the adrenaline rush, and the notoriety of posting themselves on TikTok. Few were members of established gangs, but they were grouped loosely around influential ring-leaders. When these leaders were taken out by being moved out of an area or into youth custody the local offending dropped… (Stevens, 2022, para. 1)

> The most common things being stolen were, in order, money and cash registers, retail goods (including clothing), cigarettes and tobacco, and alcohol. In both Waikato and the Bay of Plenty... ram raids are reportedly being committed for fun and notoriety, the January report said. The offending is often posted online. In Waikato it is sometimes live streamed for others to view (Stevens, 2022, para. 11)

> In other cases some offenders steal cars for fun, being bored or need to get somewhere too far to walk. People who take cars for fun just joyride for as long as they want to. After a few hours or days, police will be looking for a car that was reported stolen by the owner or user of the car. The offenders who joyride usually get caught off guard driving in stolen cars in search of police and owners. When they see police they either stop, or pull a police chase and hope to get away from them. (Leask, 2019, para. 69)

> I know that ram raids are the crime du jour and quick-fix solutions may garner some politicians an easy headline but they will never work until the young offenders find out the hard way that what looked like fun on social media is a world away from crying for their mummy while sitting in a police cell. (NZ Herald, 2022, para. 4)

These quotations use social media and fun as the basis for youth conducting ram raids. The commentary from the New Zealand Herald on the reasoning behind ram raids does not account for any scientific evidence or voice from youth ram raiders. Even though there were only a few gang members as part of ram raids, it has been mentioned as part of the article to identify connections with “ring-leaders” (Stevens, 2022, para. 11). The association with criminal behaviour is created and is emphasised with the kind of crimes being committed such as stealing goods and cars; a problem created by ram raiders for the sake of their “fun”(Stevens, 2022, para. 11). Leask (2019) noted that young people implicitly test the boundaries with risk-seeking behaviour with the police resources engaged by ram raiders as said in the last line “they either stop, or pull a police chase and hope to get away from them” (para. 69); contributing to the problematised discourse for readers to engage

in. As readers that discuss the issues from their position of power where they understand the problem of ram raiders engaging public resources as the police. They become bound by responsibility and the power they possess to govern this behaviour in alignment with their moral codes. For audiences whose moral codes do not approve of the behaviour, such representations can leave them with a negative understanding of the ram raiders from the information they have accessed. Excerpt three shows us an example of an audience member's position towards disapproval of the behaviours carried out by ram raiders and the repercussions they encounter. The individual's moral location does not agree with the current punishment of ram raiders as they have been presented with problematizations of youth offenders not being held accountable for their actions. To the reader, they are seeking harsher punishments as these "quick-fix" (NZ Herald, 2022, para. 4) solutions do not suffice and they criticise the political structures for not upholding their position of power according to the reader's morality. The reader has sought the use of another powerful institution, the media, to facilitate discussions with other citizens that may align with their moral views. The reader proceeds to acknowledge the age of the ram raiders in the section by referring to "crying for their mummy" (NZ Herald, 2022, para. 4). The researcher notes a satirical tone in this comment as throughout excerpt three the reader has explicitly disapproved of youth offenders. The tone suggests the presence of power technologies as the reader continues to communicate from their moral location and govern youth offenders' behaviours through harsher punishments that will make them aware of their actions.

The criminal discourse is formed through the media's use of three positions, with the victim position as a tool for readers to examine their moral positions. The personal accounts of victims of ram raids are presented in the following chapter to highlight victim experiences. Additionally, the emotive language of victims is explored to understand their opinion of ram raiders.

Victims

> Wheadon, who herself managed the Herne Bay store for several years before rising through the ranks of the company, said the raids were taking their toll on staff. They were looking forward to a champagne sale this week. Footage showed the ram raiders stealing and smashing the very champagne staff were looking forward to talking to customers about, Wheadon said. "Instead they are dealing with this rubbish," she said. "They deserve to feel safe at work. We are a family-owned business that employs a lot of people. There are families that rely on the business. The chain has adopted various prevention measures, including bollards, barrels filled with sand and grates on windows. We have got everything that everyone has asked us to do," Wheadon said. "But the raids keep coming". (Block, 2022, para. 15)

The excerpt states direct quotations from a store owner that speak to their experience of being ram-raided by youth. The owner adds their perspective from another subject position and has used phrases that highlight the impact on their business and their workers, by presenting the extent of harm ram raids have caused their workers and family members. The narrative emphasises emotional and financial distress experienced by everyone part of the business. This positions the owner, workers, and their families as victims, whilst ram raiders as villains. The positioning highlights the technologies of power that the media institution has used to expand to other subject positions. As audience members of the media interact with this article, they are made to question their moral locations of either supporting the villains or victims. The store owners' portrayal as a hardworking member of society defending their business from reoccurring ram raids, appeals to audiences and inclines them to support victims that share their moral universe. Thus framing the criminal discourse as ram raiders become perpetrators of the situation to be subjugated into aligning with universal morals.

A public account is deconstructed to analyse the reactions to ram raids. The display of ram raids and how they affect communities and cause social disorganisation is observed from the public

perspective. The following excerpt highlights the behaviour of ram raiders observed by a citizen and their reaction towards the act.

Public

> Another woman said she now takes an Uber door-to-door from the city to home. She doesn't feel safe walking the short distance from a building to the carpark. It's not right or fair that law-abiding Kiwis are changing their behaviours to keep themselves safe, when criminals get away with misbehaviour. Parents should be able to tuck their kids into bed with the peace of mind that the youngsters won't wake to the sound of gunfire. Shop owners trying to make a living shouldn't need to fear kids in cars ramming their store, threatening them, or shop-lifting. (van Velden, 2022, para. 2)

The sentiments of ram raiders causing criminal activity and disruptions in the community are further established. Members of the public are shown as becoming wary of how ram raids are impacting their communities and therefore not aligning with the shared moral universe. The media portrays the views of a community member positioning them as approachable to the general public. A position many individuals interacting with the newspaper article can identify with. The community members' views on feeling unsafe in their community pertain to risk to the stability of society. As the excerpt mentions New Zealanders in a general term without identifying specific regions, it becomes applicable to national New Zealand. To audiences, it becomes a group member raising awareness about ram raiders disrupting their social order. The description of 'parents should be able to tuck their kids into bed with the peace of mind that the youngsters won't wake to the sound of gunfire' governs the status of how societies should be structured and the ram raiders referred to as the youngsters disturbing this order. Furthermore, the implications that children are growing up in a society that deems criminal behaviour such as "gunfires" (van Velden, 2022, para. 2) as acceptable raises concerns for future generations as the conduct of ram raiders becomes normalised. "Criminals get away with misbehaviour" (para. 2) positions ram raiders as criminals causing disorganisation to

society through their actions and reinforcing the normalisation of this behaviour. The media offsets this by utilising group members to appeal to common moral values in restoring organisation in their communities and placing blame on ram raiders as continuous lawbreakers. The political accountability of ram raiders becomes another sphere that the media resorts to portraying young people as criminals. Power held by political figures and their influence in social structures on audience members is explored to understand shared moral values.

Politicians

> The National Party's proposal for a young-offender military academy has prompted sceptical feedback from those working in the youth crime space, with concerns it doesn't address the problems. Leader Christopher Luxon said yesterday the academy would be a space where offenders aged 15 to 17 would be sent for up to 12 months as a way of rehabilitation. The academies would provide discipline, mentoring and intensive rehabilitation to make a decisive intervention in these young offenders' lives. The academies will be delivered in partnership with the Defence Force, alongside other providers. However, the news was music to the ears of Sunny Kaushal, who has worked closely with the Government over the past year as he advocated for the businesses which were victims of ram raids and break-ins. Kaushal, president of Crime Prevention Group and the Dairy and Business Owners Association, said he supported the policy and believed it was a positive step in holding offenders accountable. I come from a family background, a military background where we're all disciplined, he said. The values in this, young offenders could benefit from as they get vocational training, they get hooked up for studies, it's very important. I think it's the correct approach. He said business owners have been living in jail-like structures while being rammed, robbed and assaulted. Luxon said during his announcement that ram raids were happening every 15 hours, showing Labour's soft-on-crime approach was failing. Kaushal said: "Those younger people who have gone off the rails need to be shown strong, constructive approaches to be [turned into] good citizens". (Morton, 2022, para. 1)

Politicians seem to be supporting the perspectives of the public as shown in the excerpt above. Christopher Luxon, a member of the political institution and having the power to disperse his opinions in a public forum as media, his statements are endorsed by his positionality. Identifying discipline as an issue for youth offending and placing young people in rehabilitation programmes becomes the main premise of the statement. The technologies of power are present in two institutions as the media can govern youth offenders through a political sphere and vice versa. By accounting for Luxon's position of power, the media is able to construct his words to appeal to the audience in the form of validity and regulate discourses. Therefore, Luxon's urgency for disciplinary measures reaffirms the criminal discourse that is circulated through media articles. However, rhetoric on "Labour's soft-on-crime approach" (Morton, 2022, para. 1) claims that there is an agenda that serves the political institution as problematizing youth offenders individualises responsibility on them, and allows the opportunity for political figures to govern youth by transforming them into ideal citizens and restoring social order. A concept audience members can agree to, as shown in Kaushal's notion that youth should be disciplined as they are currently not. Luxon's statement becomes a supplementary technology of self as it exerts power over individuals to regulate oneself in accordance to the standards set of youth offending that requires discipline and therefore becoming good citizens. There is an intersection of subject positions shown in this excerpt as Luxon and Kaushal are subjects from different positions: the politician and the citizen. However, both individuals are speaking from the same moral position where they believe youth offending needs to decrease and the criminal behaviour exhibited by youth is becoming detrimental. Therefore, a solution is administered where the youth participate in programmes; a form of subjectification which leads offending youth to act in accordance to the moral universe Luxon and Kaushal belong in.

> Public exasperation over regular attacks has been building, and National and Act have concentrated on punishment-focused responses such as longer sentences. Act wants 17-year-olds dealt with in adult courts. (NZ Herald, 2023, para. 24)

> National also seeks to increase imprisonment numbers and prison sentences, and create more youth prisons. (Mussell, 2023, para. 17)

> This month MP for Tamaki Simon O'Connor took to Facebook to talk about 15 ram raids in his electorate in the past few months. He either knows or has visited most of the business owners in Glendowie, Orakei, St Johns, Stonefields, Kohimarama and Glen Innes. He, too, says business owners are impressed with the police's initial response but are frustrated that even if the offenders are caught, they often do not appear to be charged, and they come back. They're getting away with it. That's probably the most fundamental point at the moment. What frustrates me and locals is that there doesn't appear to be enough consequences. (Phare, 2022, para. 21)

Further statements from political figures seek harsher punishment for youth ram raiders insinuating them as criminals. The first two excerpts show that National and Act leaders are referring to ram raiders as youth, however, they are recommending they be treated as adults by implementing harsher reforms. As political leaders hold power to establish policies, their statements indicate a lack of governmentality for ram raiders which requires reform. In the second excerpt, the construction of prisons relays ongoing youth offending which will require harsher punishments. The audience is influenced into presuming youth offending has increased rapidly to the extent such measures are taken. O'Connor in the third excerpt draws media attention to the number of ram raids occurring in the electorate and portrays him as fulfilling his role of political responsibility by visiting affected businesses and being aware of the damages to owners. The media has used his position to highlight the problem and gain approval from audience members portraying O'Connor as a concerned politician seeking the best outcomes for his community. To further harsh penalties on ram raiders, the media convinces audiences that politicians and business owners are impressed with police responses to ram raiders justifying actions by sharing a moral universe. It is also noticed that O'Connor does not use youth in his statements and refers to "ram raiders as offenders who are escaping responsibility for their actions and continuing ram raids as there are no

consequences”(Phare, 2022, para. 21). Thus the narrative becomes a respected political member seeking justice for business owners by subjugating youth offenders to punishments they deserve.

The criminal discourse has been shown from the perspectives of three prominent groups of victims, the general public, and politicians. Each group holds their position of power and appeals to varying demographics of readers. The victims are utilised through personal experiences to gain empathy from readers as peer relations form mutual concerns about the state of their communities. Politicians harness authoritative power to indicate to audiences growing youth offending and future reforms. Despite power differentiations amongst the groups, their moral universe appears to align which leads to positioning young people as “violent” (Nichols, 2022, para. 9) offenders deserving of punishment. As a result, the prominent groups are positioned as victims or at risk of becoming victims of ram raids. The subjectification of young offenders is proposed through alternative methods such as rehabilitation programmes and harsher punishments as a means to regulate ram raiders to the moral order suited to these groups.

Discourse II: Ram Raiders as a *Moral Panic*

Headlines are known to attract the readers to continue with the article and/or create assumptions based on passing headlines. Lee (2020) conducted a study to assess the attraction of readers to articles based on headlines and whether they were able to summarise the story. The findings of the study showed that 4.9% of headlines contained factual information, despite attracting 74.5% of readers with headlines that seemed to have at least one attracting device within them. With headlines such as “More ram raids overnight, liquor store hit twice in a month” (Henry, 2022, para.1), “Suburban warfare: Rise of the ram raiders- struggling businesses targeted in brazen attacks” (Phare, 2022, para. 1), and “Dad on ram raid son: “he’s going to kill someone - or kill himself”” (Fisher, 2022, para. 1) in the New Zealand Herald. They are providing readers with the material to assume a growing moral panic amongst readers that youth are rapidly heading towards becoming criminals. As identified in the literature review section, moral panic is defined by Cohen

(1972) as the moral barricades that monitor societal behaviour by journalists and politicians in this context. These positions identify problems that may threaten current societal values such as young people engaging in ram raids. Garland (2008) mentions in his study that moral panics have become a familiar term in everyday conversations as exaggeration from mass media can "regularly converge on a single anxiety-creating issue and exploit it for all it's worth, the utility of a negating, deflationary riposte is perfectly apparent. No wonder, then, that term has become part of the standard repertoire of public debate" (p.1). This section analyses the language of the media articles to identify the presence of terms stating or alluding the readers to an uprising of moral panic due to ram raids (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). Article excerpts will draw upon the criteria for moral panic: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility as presented in Goode and Ben-Yehuda's studies (1994). Analysis of the writers and readers and the conversations they engage in, alongside the role their positions play to legitimise the presence of moral panic, will be further analysed.

A growing concern by the public was shown over the ram raids and was voiced through the support of media articles. The concern element refers to increased media attention or action through movement and legislation avenues towards an issue created by a certain group of individuals (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

> These calls have been largely driven by concerns regarding the increase and visibility of ram raids. For some, the reality of young people being involved in this form of crime has been particularly shocking. A common public response to concerns around crime, specifically youth crime, is to call for political leaders to increase policing. (Hendry, 2023, para. 1)

> Still, an intent to tackle a rising problem such as the spate of ram raids which has become a public concern should be applauded. (NZ Herald, 2022, para. 4)

The first excerpt discusses how the visibility of ram raids has identified an increase in crimes leading to policing as a solution. Media is contributing to the visibility of reports of ram raids alluding to a moral panic discourse through increased ram raids. As journalists are identified as moral

keepers of societal order, the reports of the writer are not brought into question as their positioning retorts to them merely expressing their concern for their community affected by ram raids (Cohen, 1972). The writer makes claims that the public response over concerns for youth involved in criminal acts is to resort to increased policing (NZ Herald, 2022, para 4). The media identifies an issue and uses the positioning of public members to justify a growing concern and gain compliance from readers. A hierarchy of social status is observed as the media uses public concerns to influence readers and hold politicians accountable for policing to rectify growing ram raids. This is emphasised in the second excerpt as the media exert power on their subjects by applauding them for regulating themselves by continuing to tackle ram raids and aligning with the moral code of the institution. All the while, both excerpts use language such as “visibility”, “spate of ram raids” and “public concern” to highlight moral panic is impending (NZ Herald, 2022, para 4).

The concern for youth ram raiders can also be seen transforming into hostility. Writers and readers recognise how hostile behaviours in ram raids can threaten their community which shows development into a moral panic.

> The behaviour that leads to more serious offending, truancy, shoplifting, car break-ins need to be cracked down on. Once young people get away with these, they are emboldened to more serious crimes. Those who receive stolen goods from smash-and-grabs should be prosecuted in the harshest terms. Their immoral patronage is motivating this galling behaviour. Ram-raiders need to be chased down and dealt with in a way that spreads the word that such crimes are not cool and certainly not worth it. Long term, more should be done to avert young people from this path but right now, this is not an area where leniency and mediation are the most effective. More of these raids will inevitably lead to people being hurt or killed. (NZ Herald, 2022, para. 10)

Ram raiders have been defined as young people who will increase the seriousness of their criminal activity leading to offending that would cause more harm to communities. The article expresses two main concerns: Ram raids will become violent offenders and they should be punished

more harshly for these crimes to avoid individuals being hurt or killed by them. The first concern supports the criminal discourse and portrays ram raiders as villains of their respectable societies supporting the *them* and *us* narrative. Additionally, the threat of ram raiders as violent offenders raises panic as the consequences can lead to harmful behaviour towards members of the community. The second concern underlines hostile behaviour towards ram raiders in the form of punishment. “Immoral patronage is motivating this galling behaviour” (NZ Herald, 2022, para. 10) highlights that ram raiders are threatening the moral standards of society. As a result, positioning individuals not supporting the collective values as opposing society's moral codes. Thus the writer uses their influence to engage readers to question their morality in providing leniency for ram raiders (Melville & Marsh, 2019). As one patron attacked by a youth has said:

> “No, you know, no, heck no," he says. “What I had to deal with, a 140 kg drugged-up teen, in a rage, with a knife coming at you, heck no. I didn't shoot him, that was the main thing. Taking a life, that’s the last resort. It was the fourth time the teen, whom he knew, had broken into his home; the previous time was just a week earlier…” Feeling an affinity with dairy owners who have faced growing ram raids and violence this year, Burr encouraged them to do what it took to protect themselves from armed robbers. (Feek, 2023, para. 14)

The individual has used their position to defend their actions against the youth breaking into their home as the patron justifies their behaviour by not shooting a youth but rather cutting their finger is portrayed as a defence. He connects with the general public by appealing to the other dairy owners who have been victims of ram raids and encourages them to protect themselves. The subject can speak from the position of a member of the public who has been victimised by ram raiders, but also a figure who has used the New Zealand Herald platform to advocate for the moral panic present in society due to ram raiders. By having access to nationwide media coverage the writer's position is legitimised in the eyes of the readers (Moore, 2014). This leads readers to feel the sentiments portrayed by the subject and subjectify themselves to participating in conversations that align with

their personal moral panics against ram raiders. The enforcement of negative media coverage labelling ram raiders as criminals is appealing to the population as the consensus becomes “this country is facing a crime crisis, especially around youth crime” (Knoff-Thomas, 2023, para. 14). Media reports further support evidence to show that politicians and the general public alike are of the opinion that ram raids have caused youth crimes to increase over the years:

> Ram raids, smash-and-grabs, protests on youth justice facility rooftops: the visibility of youth crime has increased markedly, as have political frustrations, with Chris Hipkins and Christopher Luxon saying they’ve had a gutsful…These announcements follow the swell of public opinion: 87 percent of New Zealanders believe levels of youth crime have increased in the past five years. (Cheng, 2023, para. 1)

Political leaders showing their frustrations in the media alleviates concerns nationwide about the effect ram raids have on communities and creates grounds for moral panic. Rampant media reports from institutions create disproportionality in the news being received by the public. With the New Zealand Herald reporting stories of victims’ of ram raids, political outrage, and the need for harsher penalties for ram raiding contributes to the public opinion of increasing youth crime. The excerpt shows media report findings from the public believing an increase in youth crime from information provided through media articles. This becomes a powerful continuous cycle of the media distributing information to the public, and then the media using public opinion to reaffirm discourses supplied by the media. The public is grappling with the notion that there must be a reason for panic over increasing youth crime as it is supported by statistical evidence, which is information repeated by media articles. The data of this study shows repetitive information in media articles to instil concern towards increasing ram raids.

> “Ram raids have increased by more than 500 per cent for the first six months of 2022 compared to the same period in 2018, according to police statistics.” (Kinnear, 2022, para. 3)

> "More than 500 ram raids have been reported in 2022 – a six-fold increase from four years ago." (Stevens, 2022, para. 5)

Furthermore, media reports that present statistical evidence highlights the discourse of moral panic as it has research-based evidence available to the readers. The structure of the media articles is formatted to appeal to readers from various groups and is more accessible and easier to understand than lengthy reports with the same information.

> Ram raids have climbed to an average of more than two a day, prompting an Auckland judge to say the public and the police are fed up with it. Police figures released yesterday show there were at least 388 ram-raid style events in a six-month period to the end of May, including 99 which remained unsolved. During the six-month period, police said there were 218 prosecutions for ram raids, while 86 young people were referred to Police Youth Services. Last year, police recorded 516 ram raids around the country…The 2022 ram-raid data showed 70 percent of the 708 offenders caught by police were aged under 18. One in 10 were aged under 13. (Howie & Block, 2023, para. 1)

This excerpt presents statistical evidence of increasing ram raids with the authoritative position of the police presenting this information as a trusted subject weighs largely towards the receptivity of audience members (Ralph, 2021). Media uses the police's positionality to validate the information supplied to audiences. The addition of statements presented by victims:

> "I'm so scared, I'm just so scared." They're the words of a businesswoman I met, terrified that day would be the day she gets ram-raided. Shops on either side of hers have been hit in recent months. She knows it's only a matter of time. "I'm so scared, please help me". (van Velden, 2023)

The articles use emotive language in their articles to invoke sentiments from readers which can drive them to feel the anguish that the victims are experiencing (Tabbert, 2016). The moral panic is further amplified through other government officials using their time and public resources to create policies such as "militarised boot camps" (Block, 2022, para. 35). This indicates the need to

reprimand youth and create reassurance for the nation that measures are being taken to keep the morality of the community in order. As a result, the subjectification of youth ram raiders to policies that regulate their behaviour to align with the moralities of their community.

Moral panics exist in communities in volatility as they can be present in short periods of time or become dormant and erupt suddenly. Ram raiders causing moral panics have erupted recently as the study shows that there has been a gradual increase in reporting of ram raiders within the past five years. As shown in Table 4, the majority of the articles have been from 2022 and 2023. Despite the volatility of the moral panic surrounding ram raids, it is acknowledged that the media recruits various subject positions to provide material to readers that will lead to moral panic associated with ram raids. The reactions by the media and the various subject positions associated with the published articles create a state of fear towards the behaviours of ram raiders.

The discourse of moral panic is shown through the media perceptions which increase social anxieties towards an outgroup of ram raiders. Media exercises their power of wide readership to continuously disperse material that emphasises a moral panic. The presence of political pressure exercised through social institutions of police and concerned citizens leads to positioning young people as a threat to social order. The public views young people as not accepting the consequences of their behaviour leading to political responses of harsh penalties and retribution to satisfy public concerns.

Discourse III: *Us vs Them* Ram Raiders as *Outsiders*

Related to the discourses of ram raiders as *criminals* and the accompanying *moral panic* being reflected in the media representations, the *othering* of these young people was identified in this study as a discursive practice. The criminal discourse and moral panic discourse are evidently against the moral code of the subjects and do not align with their shared moral universe. Therefore, the subjects adhering to the moral code become an us and the ram raiders denying the code become a *them* (Fiske & Hancock, 2016). A series of two groups are created which can be seen

through the ram raiders and an outsiders discourse is portrayed. This section explores the outsiders discourse by showing the us and them narrative created through statements provided by victims and the public. The outsiders discourse will be further examined through language that portrays racial disparities and gang associations with ram raiders.

Criminal and moral panic discourses include excerpts of victims that pose blame on the ram raiders for their offending and the “pain” (van Velden, 2023, para. 9), they have caused their communities. This is exemplified in the excerpt from Shivneel Kumar’s open letter to the prime minister in regards to losing his father due to a ram raid.

> Shivneel Kumar has penned an open letter to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Justice Minister Kiri Allan urging tougher consequences for repeat youth offenders, who he says are waging war on our communities. “I ask you, as a helpless son that has lost his father, to the lawmakers of this country, to please take a stand and make a change," Kumar writes. “Eight years ago I prayed no other family would have to suffer like we did, hoping my dad’s death would not be in vain, but the system that failed us then, has failed us yet again. Something has to change.” Arun Kumar, 57, was stabbed to death at his dairy on Railside Ave in Henderson in June 2014. The 13-year-old attacker was found guilty of manslaughter but not guilty of murdering the father of two, while a 12-year-old accomplice was acquitted. Both were granted permanent name suppression. The fatal blow to Arun’s neck was delivered with such force that it severed an artery and left a knife mark on his vertebrae. Arun’s wife, Anita, tended to her husband as he lay dying and covered in blood…..(para. 2) Patel’s death has sent shock waves through New Zealand, sparking protest action by shop owners and calls for the Government to tackle violent offending following a spate of ram raids, smash-and-grab robberies and serious violent crime. Kumar’s letter urges the Government to take action to protect communities. “Eight years ago, a 14-year-old ended my father’s life with an army knife over some money in the till and cigarettes at our dairy in Henderson. To my horror and absolute disgust we find history repeating itself with the loss of the

> life of Mr Patel late last week, a stark reminder that not enough action has been taken to prevent this again". (Nichols, 2022, para. 9)

The quote begins with a reaction towards ram raiders. The sentence "waging war on our communities" (Nichols, 2022, para. 9) is an overt representation of addressing ram raiders as another group that is in a conflictual relationship with the citizens. This is overtly combative language to reflect a hostile positioning: we are citizens who are innocent, honest, hardworking, law abiders defending ourselves against aggressors who are violent, anti-social, dishonest, with no work ethic, and lawbreakers. While supporting the moral panic discourse by essentially claiming that they are creating a nuisance to "our community" (para. 9), addressing that ram raiders fall outside of this community. The language supports the 'us vs them' discourse as ram raiders cannot belong to a community in which they don't follow the moral order. An order created by the people belonging to the community and reinforced by social institutions such as the media. Kumar continues to share his personal experience of ram raiders that caused significant harm to their family and resulted in the death of their father. The use of personal examples allows the readers to connect with Kumar's story and empathise with the family's grief. Foxman and partners (2021) studies have suggested that the strive for empathy for writers, journalists, and researchers is the ability to use media for positive social changes. Manney (2008) supports empathy as being used as a tool through storytelling creates social empathy especially when used through media technologies. Kumar uses another highly tragic example of the death of Patel which was also a result of a ram raid to draw readers towards recent events and compare it to the tragedy they experienced many years ago. Empathetic words can invoke readers into participating in conversations constructed by the media and supported by the experiences of victim subjects (Manney, 2008). Kumar speaks from their positionality as a citizen to raise problematizations for readers to engage in conversations surrounding ram raids from their own subject positions. Readers connecting with the empathetic language of Kumar's story may develop the same moral order and identify with the same group and *othering* ram raiders in the process. The

conversations could lead to seeking further knowledge on how ram raids could affect the structures of their communities and actions that can be taken to combat social disorganisation.

The study found other articles that detail information about financial distress and violence due to ram raids that draw readers to empathy towards victims and contempt towards ram raiders:

> Recent spikes in violent crime in areas including Auckland and Waikato had prompted several developments in the Government's approach to crime, including new police powers to target fleeing drivers and a multi-million-dollar suite of changes to address retail crime after the fatal stabbing of 34-year-old Auckland dairy worker Janak Patel. The new approach to offenders aged 10-13 applies to children involved in serious or persistent offending, such as ram raids, aggravated robberies and fleeing police. (Pearse, 2022, para. 4)

> On youth crime we should go hard and early (why waste a good slogan?) There won't be many ram-raiding kids who didn't start small, get away with it, and go bigger. Kids need to learn that there are consequences for their actions . The faster that lesson can be learnt, the less likely they are to reoffend. (van Velden, 2022, para. 15)

> Businesses, particularly in Auckland, have been tormented by young criminals in recent months with spikes in ram raids and smash-and-grabs, sometimes carried out by the same offenders. Yesterday, members of the public bravely fought off thieves, one armed with an axe as they tried to rob a watch shop, About Time, in the Auckland suburb of Remuera. In the six weeks between the end of May and mid-July, at least 12 jewellery store smash-and-grabs had occurred, the Herald reported earlier. (Pearse, 2022, para. 7)

The New Zealand Herald provides a snapshot of the experiences of store owners and the reactions of prominent government officials in their articles towards ram raiders in attempts to control the narrative portrayed to their readers. They are responsible for providing information to subjects that are assimilated into daily conversations and define the moral code created in society.

The data shows there are two evident profiles: the victims are hardworking business owners who are continuously being targeted by irresponsible young people disobeying moral codes by offending. Institutions possess the power to determine the voice behind authors and provide them with the power to recreate these discourses (Peters & Appel,1996).

The use of empathetic language and the experiences of victims have led to the *othering* of ram raiders as the outside group. Media reports are shown to create a profile of the youth involved in the ram raids. The empathetic language towards victims has labelled the ram raiders with names such as “Little Bo Peep and Little Red Riding Hood” (Feek, 2023, para. 80) positioning them as “thieves” (Pearse, 2022, para. 8).

Ethnicity

An emphasis on ethnic communities associated with systemic factors such as education is addressed in this section to understand whether racial underpinnings are included in the representations of youth ram raiders. By identifying the ethnicities of the young ram raiders, the researcher highlights the presence of institutionalised racism in media reports.

> At least 45 children or teenagers have allegedly been behind eight crimes such as break-ins and ram raids reported over the school holidays. Twenty-three people are either facing charges in the District Court or Youth Court, or referred to Youth Aid with the other half still on the run. The holidays started with two teenage boys being seriously assaulted during a party at a Remuera home on the Thursday before Easter and it ended yesterday with a group of youths ram-raiding an Icebreaker clothing store near Auckland Airport…Despite these crimes happening during the school holidays, she suspected the young people involved have not been at school for a long time. The Government is set to soon announce a package to tackle stubbornly high truancy levels, with more than 40 per cent of students now not going to school regularly an increase of 10

> percentage points since 2015, with huge disparities for Māori and Pacific children and lower-income households. (Campbell, 2022, para. 4)

The excerpt begins with a broad statistical statement of the rise of ram raids due to the school holidays. There is a divide created by the writers by explicitly naming one of the most affluent suburbs in Auckland where an assault incident took place and continues to describe a ram raid occurring at a store. The quote “despite these crimes happening during the school holidays, she suspected the young people involved have not been at school for a long time”(Campbell, 2022, para. 4), then continues to describe the increase of truancy rates referring to Māori and Pacific children from lower-income households responsible for high thresholds. Despite not explicitly claiming ram raids are associated with children from Māori and Pacific ethnic groups and low-income households, the associative language can show a relationship being formed between the groups. De Deyne and colleagues (2018) suggest that when two words frequently appear with one another in text or speech-language, they can develop an associative relationship. The subjects can internalise such associations to ram raiders creating another layer of the outsider’s discourse.

> Research shows Māori, Pacific peoples and other racialised peoples are more likely to be charged, to suffer the use of force, face imprisonment and experience negative stereotyped coverage in the media. We have known about this for decades, including through Moana Jackson’s seminal *He Whaipaanga Hou* report. It is connected to colonial disruption and institutions more readily targeting people who are brown, poor and disabled (including mental disability and substance dependency). Māori constitute 17 percent of the general population and are hyper-represented at every stage of the criminal justice system, particularly in prison, comprising 52.8 percent of prisoners. The media focuses on sensational cases. Ram raids, gang and interpersonal violence are happening, but tough-on-crime agendas will not stop this. (Mussell, 2022, para. 6)

The use of statistical information to show the racialisation of Māori and Pacific people with high numbers of Māori prisoners is readily available in this excerpt. Although the information

advocates for the targeting of “brown” people (Mussell, 2022, para. 6) for being stereotyped in the media. The excerpt continues to support the outsider’s discourse by presenting a division of two groups. Gangs are another group of individuals linked with the ram raiders as shown by the data indicating negative stereotyping. Subjects interacting with the excerpt can associate race with negative identities through the statistics. Māori and Pacific people are presented as targets of the media, alternatively, the media forum is used to present this information. Despite criticising criminal justice and media institutions, the writer engages with both institutions to emphasise their point. This highlights that negative representations can be resisted through the same power structures they are created through. Esbensen and Tusinski (2007) found in their analysis that news reporters distorted the picture of youth gangs by reporting misperceptions and skewing towards a stereotypical image being constantly reinforced. The stereotypes extend to highlighting ethnic minorities as a higher percentage of gang members presenting gang issues as a racial problem.

Gangs

The New Zealand Herald presented similar articles by using the term *gang/gangs* 95 times in reports related to ram raids. They were presented in attempts to diminish the growing ram raids:

> “We’ve all seen the news recently on gangs and ram raids”, Faafoi said at yesterday’s press conference. (Kapitan & Trevett, 2022, para. 3)

> [National police spokesman Mark] Mitchell meanwhile accused the Government of taking a “head-in-the-sand approach” over the issue of youth crime and said “they were naive to call it low-level juvenile offending.” “As long as gangs have been around, they are constantly recruiting and that includes young people,” he said. “They do get them into prospect, they do get them to commit crime because they know that the youth justice system is softer on them and so they transfer the risk to the young people instead of themselves.” Police Minister Chris Hipkins said there was no evidence to show a “formal link between ram raids and adult gangs” but

> acknowledged this kind of youth offending can “lead to more serious crimes and gang membership later in life.” “Ironically, some of the tough on crime opposition rhetoric would drive these youth offenders towards gangs rather than away from them”, he added. (Kinnear, 2022, para. 21)

Whilst the first excerpt distinguishes gangs and ram raids as synonymous with each other by linking the two terms together; in the second excerpt, Mitchell gives conviction to the notion that young people are being recruited by gangs to evade the punishment of the law. His positionality stands firm on harsher punishment for young offenders, which the current government has not provided. Hipkins defends links between ram raiders and gangs, however, contradicts his statement by acknowledging their future may consist of life-persistent pathways and gang affiliation. Despite both ministers holding the same positionality for audiences, their views differ in Mitchell seeking harsher punishments for young offenders, and Hipkins defending “tough on crime” (para. 21) would drive youth towards offending pathways. This excerpt provides audiences with narratives from both governments and the opportunity to contemplate which political structure they support, as ultimately readers would favour the side their moral codes align with and they hold the power to elect governmental decision-makers on this issue.

The criminal and moral panic discourse correlates with the outsider discourse, especially in portraying ram raiders as youth gang members. Gang members have fundamentally been constituted as individuals who are regularly partaking in violent offending and criminal behaviour (Wolf, 2012). They have been linked with causing moral panic in society for decades (Gilbert, 2013). Thus associating gangs with youth ram raiders further contributes to the criminal and moral panic discourse while othering them in the process as their actions do not coincide with the universal values of the community they affiliate with. The media works as a technology to inform its subjects of the knowledge they seek and by interconnecting ethnic minorities and gang membership relations

to ram raiders; groups identified as posing a threat to the inside group (Brown, 2010) discursively positioning ram raiders as the outside group.

While the media have been instrumental in constructing and reinforcing the criminal, moral panic, and outsider discourse; we have no evidence to suggest that this is a deliberate campaign between an institution and an outgroup. However, there is evidence to show that media representations have not only framed ram raiders in certain ways such as criminals, *folk devils* (Cohen, 1972), and the other; but have reflected and reinforced institutional structures through positioning narratives and discursive practices present in media texts. Readers who engage with the technology can identify inclusionary and exclusionary groups by the articles produced by the media. Power held by news media uses a platform to drive their discursive practices on subject readers and have them question the validity of their moral universe and the groups that do and do not adhere to it. Therefore, groups such as ram raiders become outsiders as they do not align with moral values of societal structures.

Discourse IV: Ram Raiders as *Victims*

The media negatively positioned ram raiders through the discourses of ram raiders as criminals, causing moral panics, and being labelled as outsiders. However, the data showed a small number of articles reflecting a sympathetic perspective of ram raiders as children and victims of their situations. The ram raiders-as-victims discourse can be shown through the subjects using the media institution to counteract the negative discourses by using information that allows readers to empathise and connect with ram raiders. Further statistical evidence provides a levelled platform for readers to question the sensationalization of media reports and understand their discursive practices. This section analyses media using various positions to challenge the moral universe they interact with daily and in the process challenging the dominant discourses presented to readers.

Although the criminal discourse stands to be heavily highlighted in media articles. There are articles produced by the New Zealand Herald that allow members of the public working with children to share their perspectives.

> "Youth worker Aaron Hendry said "Restorative justice actually works, young people are allowed to take responsibility for their actions ... then receive support so it does not happen again." (Maher, 2022, para. 36)

Hendry's position as a social worker who is accustomed to supporting and interacting with children who have been involved in ram raids, highlights a contradicting discourse to discursive positions previously presented. The quote advocates for a restorative justice approach and the language in this statement identifies ram raiders as "young people" (Maher, 2022, para. 36); rather than the discourses shown in previous articles identified as "criminals"(Pearse, 2022, para. 7). The media positions Hendry to share a viewpoint and counter current criminal discourses of ram raiders. Given Hendry's position has legitimacy as he is a moral citizen and recognised as a professional in his field, his perspective can create conflicts for readers to engage in. The power of Hendry's positionality weighs heavily as it challenges political and social structures that control dominant discourses. As a result, uncertainty forms for audiences as the information does not align with the dominant discourse supported by politicians and victims of ram raids.

Just as government officials belong to political institutions and are presented with power from their positionality; academics' positionality is associated with educational institutions and can influence the audience to consider conflicting discourses.

> A study has provided a startling look into the link between youth involved in ram-raids and family harm. The Police National Youth Team prepared notes for the Children's Commissioner about the relationship between family harm and youths identified in recent ram-raid events. A sample of 63 children and young people was drawn from those involved in ram-raids in Christchurch, the Bay of Plenty, Auckland, and Waikato, in the year to May 2022. They were, on average, about four

> years old at this first contact with police. Sixty-five per cent of the sample were linked to five or more family harm events, and 35 per cent were linked to more than 10 events. Most of the group were children when they were first recorded by police as a suspect or offender, with just over half of the group being aged 10 to 12 at the time. Maori were also heavily over-represented, making up 71 per cent of the group, and 85 per cent were male. Shine's senior family violence educator Mira Taitz said there was good support available for children who've experienced family harm, but there were gaps where people are not accessing it. We know that children respond to violence in a variety of ways, there's no one response from children, she said. (Daniels, 2022, para. 1)

The study presented in the excerpt directly contradicts the criminal discourse as it provides evidence that there may be reasons leading to the ram raids for these children and creates a bond of empathy for them. Ram raiders are not seen as criminals who resort to theft and burglary for the sake of creating a moral panic. Rather, the article provides a broader picture of what may be leading these children to ram raids and the social and systemic factors that they may not have control over. Additional information that draws on the ethnic disparities of family violence that is linked to ram raiders provides the basis for the number of ethnic ram raiders and diminishes the outsider discourse. It further supports that children engaging in ram raids are victims of the systemic and social structures in place by political institutions. By providing diverse perspectives on discourses, readers can hold themselves and political figures accountable for transformative change and community development; rather than individualised responsibility on ram raiders conducting criminal activity.

> The police watchdog has heavily criticised an investigation into an officer who was captured on CCTV striking two youths who were not resisting arrest. The Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) says the office was "pre-emptively exonerated", and the police appeared to have "no regard" to their view on the investigation. The watchdog released a summary of the

> investigation on Thursday. According to the summary, the incident occurred on December 18, 2021, when police were searching for five youths who were suspected of committing a ram raid on a shop in the Bay of Plenty. The group had abandoned their car and fled, with police pursuing on foot and in their cars. “When police encountered one of the youths, an officer took him to the ground by force to arrest him,” the IPCA said in its summary.” Having done so the officer struck the youth several times with his hand, fist, and knee. The officer also walked over to another young person who was being held face-down on the ground by another officer, and struck him at least twice with an open hand”. (Sherwood, 2023, para. 1)

The excerpt criticises the treatment of “five youths” (Sherwood, 2023, para. 4) who committed a ram raid and were fleeing from the scene of the crime. The language shows that ram raids are only mentioned on one occasion, with the majority of the excerpt referring to the individuals involved as youth. This positions ram raiders from criminals to victims and framing them as victims of the police. The positionality of the police is framed as exerting their power over young people by physically abusing them. Power held by media is acknowledged as they have shifted the power dynamics of the two groups with previously police being positioned as victims of ram raiding crimes that have now become perpetrators of violence towards young people. This leads audiences to reconsider their stance on punishment towards young people as the reality is displayed explicitly in this excerpt.

The New Zealand Herald further positioned other scholars to counteract the moral panic discourse and portray ram raiders as victims. Professors provide their commentary on ram raids as being drawn out of proportion when it comes to moral panics.

> University of Auckland clinical psychology professor Ian Lambie, who specialises in young people, said there was an element of media-driven “moral panic” about ram raids which appeared to make more of a problem than it was. “The vast majority of kids are going to school. The vast majority of kids are doing what they’re meant to be doing”… However, he said there was a need

> for greater investment in youth and to focus that in schools where the definition of "education" could broaden to encompass a "life course approach". (Fisher, 2022, para. 35)

The professor's positionality presents a contrast between the number of youth conducting ram raids and the number of youth that are behaving according to society. For instance, "going to school" and "doing what they're meant to be doing" (Fisher, 2022, para. 35) refutes the moral panic discourse as the majority of the children are identified as following the social order. The excerpt critiques and recommends educational institutions provide skills to young people that will benefit the overall social structures. The young people engaging in ram raids are shown to be victims of institutions such as the educational system as they are not provided with the necessary skill set to navigate social structures. This challenges the individualised model of blaming young people for ram raids shown in the dominant discourses and poses that structural institutions are not providing necessary support to children. Audiences engaging with the victim discourse and reconsidering punitive punishment for youth can hold institutional structures accountable for the lack of resources that dissuade youth from ram raiding behaviour.

> "A perception of youth crime on the increase is not backed up by the data. The reality is much more positive, with youth crime steadily trending down for several years now." (Hendry, 2023, para. 4)

Another excerpt positioning an academic presented information advocating for data they have found which opposes the dominant discourses linked with the ram raiders. The representation of various viewpoints that contradict the criminal, moral panic, and outsider discourse is necessary as it provides readers with the ability to question their moral universe and the ruling discursive practices they interact with. The readers are challenged despite a disproportional amount of articles with diverging narratives to mainstream media. The varying narratives are significant for discussions to occur for audiences to consider pro-social factors of interacting with young people towards positive interventions, or following dominant discourses towards punitive actions. The audiences can

weigh up both processes to decide which they believe suits their moral order and take steps according to their decision e.g. voting for political figures that align with punishment vs constructive interventions.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the current study in light of discursive formations and practices reflected in representations of ram raiders in New Zealand. The deconstruction of the discourses is explored through the effects on the youth demographic and the power media institutions hold. Implications and limitations established in the study are presented, alongside further research and policy recommendations that could be utilised in New Zealand.

The Dominant Discourses: Ram Raiders as Criminal Out-groups

As presented throughout the previous chapter, media articles through the New Zealand Herald have represented ram raiders as a criminal out-group. Youth are portrayed as individuals that were conducting criminal activity such as burglaries and theft resulting in political leaders and members of the public seeking harsh punishment to regulate their behaviour. The dominant discourse is supported by overlapping discourses of ram raiders inciting a moral panic as well as these young people being identified and positioned as a minority and outsiders.

Discursive methods employed by media reports have constructed ram raiding to be an individualised issue. The focus drawn on ram raiders as criminals has been reiterated throughout articles creating a perception of ram raiders as inherently causing the problem and not aligning with the moral codes in society. The repetitive positioning of youth causing harm to business owners and their growing number of offences has led to affirming the media representation of ram raiders as criminals.

The discourse of ram raiders as criminals was portrayed using emotive language and the villainizing scope of youth ram raiders to reinforce media perspectives. The construction of youth often conducting criminal activities such as burglaries was presented as stealing “for fun” or “being bored” (Leask, 2019). This shifted the blame towards youth involved in criminal behaviour without taking responsibility for factors that could lead youth to such offending. Risk factors researched by

academics that depict parenting, family income, education, and environmental stressors that can lead to delinquent and criminal behaviour (Farrington et al., 2016; Farrington et al., 2023) were not addressed in media articles. The large scope of the published articles focused on positioning youth as criminals rather than at-risk youth who require specialised support. The responsibilities of youth to manage institutional structures and associated risks on their own lead to new issues and the marketing of punitive solutions. Youth are being treated as rational decision-makers that are responsible for their own futures, while simultaneously differentiating youth from the general public based on their risky behaviours that they should be reprimanded for to transition into adulthood.

Despite there being a discourse of moral panic that youth were not behaving to the expectations set out for them in society, the articles showed very little concern towards their well-being. Rather, there were ongoing parliamentary discussions regarding the punishment of youth conducting ram raids and requiring corrective resources to rectify the issue. Governments can exercise their power by individualising the ram raiders issue to support the discourse of criminals. The media positioned politicians and police to enforce laws that would be suitable for offenders while discarding notions that these laws were being set for children as young as 11 years old (Henry, 2022). In contrast, the absence of narrative from young people participating in ram raids is highlighted by the researcher as policies are discussed by lawmakers, rather than individuals that the law would affect. Media narratives reinforce notions of governmentality as children's agency is diminished by their representations as criminals.

This thesis questions the influence of power structures such as media outlets that are continuously creating an image of ram raiders without assessing their status as youth. There are stereotypical representations of youth once labelled by media as ram raiders, which in turn are perceived by the public as violent criminals. The simplification media provides with their labels reduces the complexity of the issue and dismisses other factors that could be contributing to the ram raiding behaviour (Marsh & Melville, 2019; McCreanor et al., 2014). The labels provide the

public with an individualised outlook on ram raiders with numerous negative implications such as public opinions driving punitive policy changes. The public opinions are guided by media articles that fail to provide insight into the complexity of youth participating in ram raids. Whereas, dehumanising youth to ram raiders, increases public support towards harsher punishment and policies towards ram raiders.

This thesis highlights that it is problematic to portray youth conducting criminal activities through the use of the ram raiders label as the sensationalising of the term has negative connotations attached to it (McCreanor et al., 2014). Beck and Ritter (1992) present that individualisation is dependent on institutionalised power that leads to generated risk which places fault on individual decision making. Media articles focusing on the broader reasonings behind youth ram raids may allow support from the public towards programmes for youth that negate criminal behaviour and take responsibility as a community, rather than an individualised model which results in severe penalties for youth (Rodríguez Gutiérrez, 2019).

Consequences for Young People

An *us* vs *them* rhetoric was exercised in media articles for the public to develop a discursive understanding of ram raiders as outsiders. Ram raiders were constructed as violent criminals which supported the outgroup discourse. Whilst the victims of the crimes committed by ram raiders were positioned as the in-group, emotive language and personal accounts provided the general public with articles to gain a perception of the victim narrative. By positioning ram raiders as a threat to society belonging to outgroups; the discourse supports the public's position on harsh punishment for ram raiders as a product of social control (Vogel & Messner, 2024). The creation of these two groups poses an us vs them notion which has direct implications on the masses' opinions on the ram raiders resulting in punitive policies.

To build on the outgroup position of ram raiders, young people were linked with gangs that are also deemed as an outgroup associated with serious criminal behaviours (Gilbert, 2013). This

usually extends to criminal gangs that gain profit from committing criminal activity and participating in delinquent behaviour which forms negative discourses for community members (Klein, 1971; Woo, 2017). By associating ram raiders with gangs, the position of their outgroup membership grows further with the negative connotations of gangs becoming a part of the ram raiders' identity. Additionally, the discourse of ram raiders as outsiders mentions ethnic minorities such as Māori and Pasifika communities in conjunction with the label. Ethnic minorities and immigrants have been part of the outgroup in many situations as they pose a threat to the existing social order (Benier & Higginson, 2024; Brown, 2010). Social identification processes that lead to prejudice and discrimination are maintained for the well-being of the ingroups (Celebi et al, 2017). The presence of gangs and ethnic minorities being associated with ram raiders aligns with the group threat theory (Blalock, 1967) as the outgroups increase the threat to ingroup members with increased conflict and hostility towards the outgroup members (Han, 2022). Ram raiders produce a threat of disrupting the power structures and moral codes created by institutions and are received with the same hostility.

The identification of the ingroups can be seen in the subject positions providing their perspective on ram raiding issues in articles. Victims' views and support from politicians are taken into account as they belong to the ingroup which is further supported by the public. This support can be viewed from the majority of the articles incorporating statements and stories from the positionality of the victims and using emotive language to allow the general public to empathise and identify with them. The lack of presence of personal accounts of the crime from the ram raiders has not been presented in the media to allow them the opportunity to provide their reasoning behind the crime. This is an example of the power structures in media as they are responsible for censoring the published material and can include information that will form their discourses. In return, media as an institution can position certain subjects that support their discursive practices.

This thesis questions the imbalance of perspectives from both groups as the subject position of ram raiders is not considered in the articles. This can be attributed to the media possessing the

power to choose positions that reproduce discourses they identify with to continue social control. There are a number of articles from the New Zealand Herald that constantly produce the criminal and outsider discourse throughout their publishing. The creation of the outgroups and the ability of ingroups to deny outgroups with resources to present their statements is a testament to the power held by the ingroup members. These members hold the subject positions and are part of institutional structures such as the newspaper to engage in conversations with the public and reinforce discursive practices. Thus, creating discourses that label ram raiders as criminals and outsiders without the input of the outgroup and knowledge of their moral location.

Why the Moral Panic?

Ram raiders were shown to create a moral panic in the community through their behaviour through the use of attention-grabbing headlines and the legitimisation of a panic created through various subject positions (Lee, 2020; Moore, 2014). The use of language that alarmed the audience was shown throughout the article excerpts as reports of the ram raids increased in a short period of time. In addition to ram raids being a constant issue being focused on by parliamentarians for new policies to subside ram raids caused by youth (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).

In reference to Cohen's (1972) definition of a moral panic that occurs in society due to a negative reaction to an issue and raises concerns from the masses. The past has shown that moral panics seem to be associated with the youth demographic as their at-risk behaviour becomes a reflection of society's future determining life-persistent and adolescent-limited offending pathways. With increased reports of youth ram raiders, the media creates a moral panic in communities that youth are resorting to criminal behaviour rather than following traditional moral activities in which they should be participating. The power relations show that the discourses of young people engaging in criminal activities are created by institutional media, rather than questioning whether youth of ram raiding have had the opportunity to experience morally acceptable activities. The systemic factors are highlighted as children who do not have access to such opportunities may show

antisocial tendencies. However, the New Zealand Herald articles do not account for systemic factors that show young people offending through ram raids may be a result of other factors but are rather discursively shown to be criminals.

Causing a moral panic over youth is not a new revelation as there have been previous events in history where a term has been associated with youth for their at-risk behaviour. The term *bodgies* and *widgies* are associated with juvenile gangs as youth identities that share similar interests and influences (Eggleston, 2000) such as sexual promiscuity and rebellious behaviour (Payne, 1997). Similarly, the term ram raiders has been used by the media to associate "youths plaguing Auckland businesses" and "smash and grabs" (Pearse, 2022). Discourses with negative definitions distributed through widespread media institutions can harness negative implications on the individuals linked to the labels. The media can socially control the discourse of ram raiders by displaying stigmatic labelling which can lead to discrimination, stereotyping, and social exclusion for individuals being linked to labels that are perceived as causing harm to a community's sense of pride (Smyrnova, 2015). For instance, the label of *ram raiders* that has been given to youth committing offences is controlled by the media as there were no legislative definitions of the term till 2023 (NZ Legislation Disclosures, 2023). The label creates a length of moral panic in social spheres as it disrupts the reintegration of ex-offenders for a successful re-entry into their communities, especially being more difficult for individuals that belong to marginalised groups such as young offenders (Quinn-Hogan, 2021).

Ram Raids and Social Crises

Cohen (1972) further argued that moral panics tend to surface during unstable times in the midst of a crisis in regards to youth. The study has indicated that the term ram raiders seems to be sensationalised in the media over the past five years with increased reports in 2022 and 2023 in the New Zealand Herald. This can be linked to coinciding issues in the media of events that many felt were out of their control such as natural disasters, financial crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nivette et al. (2021) found that during mandatory lockdowns across 27 cities worldwide, including Auckland, there was an overall decrease of 37% in crime across all cities. However, there seemed to be an increase in traffic, theft, and burglary-related crimes once the lockdown period was eased. Similar results during the March to May 2020 COVID-19 lockdown showed a decrease in crime in six different cities (Cheung & Gunby, 2023). With the strict policies of lockdown imposed on citizens, there was an overall decrease in crime especially for non-residential burglaries, with homicide being an exception. However, the link between the events and the decrease of criminal offending is merely coincidental as data for this study does not provide further evidence on the correlation.

This thesis questions the visibility of articles about ram raids by media institutions that continue to portray a moral panic in society by the exhibiting negative behaviour of youth ram raiders as it contradicts the statistics regarding youth crime rates. Furthermore, the lack of emotive language and research on offending behaviour towards ram raiders can be accredited to Cohen's second stage of moral panic which explains that the media simply reports what happens. However, media reporting of high rates of youth offending and the frustrations of political leaders, the general public, and victims, can produce negative attitudes from the audience. The stigma around the youth involved in ram raids caused a moral panic which was accentuated by authoritarians such as politicians that suggested harsher punishments towards youth ram raiders may control the situation, all the while being able to practice their governmentality over young people.

The power held by these subject positions are able to continually emphasise the value systems of society whilst amplifying the deviant behaviour of ram raiders threatening social morality. Media presents as an overarching powerful institution that distributes information to the masses. However, the relationship between subject positions and media becomes symbiotic as each is significant in the creation of discourses. Media is used as a platform by subject positions to depict their moral standing; while media uses authoritative and powerful subject positions to legitimise their publishing. The extensive reach of the publications and support from subject positions lead to

creating the moral panic discourse. This thesis concludes that the reliability and personal values of the subject positions are not taken into account by the masses as they appeal to the global moral codes of society.

Competing Discourse

The media utilises a small number of subject positions that hold power through other institutional connections, such as academics. This can be seen as the media constructing opposing discourses to provide audiences with a duality of opinions on ram raiders. They hold the power to emphasise the narratives they want to engage readers and explore public reactions. The addition of academics and professionals working with youth providing their perspectives allows the general public to engage with an alternative view and question the mainstream information provided by the majority of the subject positions. Moreover, the information provided by alternative subject positions aligns with the statistical evidence provided by government organisations which suggests that there has been a decline in youth crimes (Chambers, 2022). Insight from academics on the complexities of young people committing ram raids is also taken more sincerely as they hold educational and media institutional power. Alternative subject positions appeal to the humanising aspect of the ram raiders as they dispute the discourses and highlight them as youth and young children rather than criminals.

This thesis understands that alternative arguments are necessary to have representation of various subject positions that can adhere to the perspective of ram raiders by resisting dominant discourses that dismiss the complexity of factors leading to youth offending. Media institutions portray ram raiders as criminals and outsiders causing moral panic reduces humanisation of them as complex individuals with overlapping characteristics which leads to criminal activity. By engaging academic scholars the media is able to reclaim the dichotomy of their power as their positioning in social structures seems impartial and unbiased, providing audiences with opposing narratives to engage in further media articles and determine their position on ram raiding behaviour. The

researcher highlights the duality of the narratives are essentially controlled by media institutions and by providing contradictory narratives they gain social control and trust from their readers while managing discourses that may arise from other platforms. However, as the study has shown, there is a disproportional number of media articles that present the competing discourse to the dominant discourse. Therefore, whilst the media depicts they are providing audiences with an equivalent number of articles of both situations, the audiences are interacting with an unbalanced number of reports that support discourses of criminals and outsiders rather than ram raiders as victims.

Ram Raiders as Victims - An Alternative Perspective

Dominant discourse of ram raiders as criminals with the addition of moral panic and outsiders discourses have framed youth in a negative perspective. This has resulted in the public taking a punitive stance on the punishments of ram raiders and focusing on a “harden up on criminals” (van Velden, 2022, para. 1) approach. The competing discourse challenges these prominent discourses conveyed in the media. It provides the public with a contrasting opinion which advocates for the complexities of the youth behind the label of ram raiders. These perspectives discuss the systematic factors that have led youth to ram raiding, rather than focusing on the distress caused by the crimes they have committed. The alternative view of ram raiders calls attention to the “failed policies of the past” from politicians that are promising a “tough-on-crime” attitude (Mussell, 2023, para. 17). While powerful institutions such as the media distribute information about the ram raids. The disproportionate number of articles supporting dominant and competing discourses can skewer public opinions.

The significance of the two perspectives allows various implications for ram raiders and stimulates discussion amongst the public to diversify their thinking. The dominant discourse sparks conversation around harsher policies and a cynical opinion of ram raiders. The competing discourse produces a reformative and humanising attitude from the public. Hence, leading to understanding the constraints of ram raiders feeling like outsiders which is a result of societal structures and

factors. Whilst holding organisations accountable towards policies that will provide beneficial outcomes for the community and young people participating in ram raids.

Discursive Consequences: Punitive Punishment vs Constructive Youth Programmes

Media institutional power has created dominant discourses framing youth as criminals with growing notions towards punitive punishment for ram raiders. Foucault (1977) observed that punishment in the form of imprisonment became the preferred regime to control social deviance. The normalisation of prisons as the primary method of disciplining youth seems to be supported by the discourses in the media. Despite studies presenting long-term impacts on imprisoned youth that could lead to higher recidivism rates with a total of more offences committed (Kurlychek et al., 2022), and increased self-harm, drug abuse, and diminished personal value (Tasisa & Palanimuthu, 2021). Foucault (2008) argued that prisons were a means of gaining social control over vulnerable groups that were framed to be imprisoned for their own good (Jouet, 2021). Media institutions uphold these notions present in the discourses which lead to tougher outcomes for youth as shown through the data in the study.

Incarceration for youth may be used as a form of protection for the public while rectifying misbehaviour. However, within the complexities of youth offending such as ram-raiding, incarceration fails juvenile offenders as it leads to ongoing mental health issues and further engagement with the criminal justice system (Lambie & Randell, 2013; Moran et al., 2024). There are recommendations for rehabilitative programmes to explore the complexities of young offenders (Lambie & Randell, 2013; Sandøy et al., 2022). The presence of competing discourses that highlight the negatives of incarcerating youth and proposing alternative methods becomes vital.

Dominant discourses that lead to imprisonment highlight an individualised approach to punishing young people. Youth programmes are mentioned through the competing discourse as an alternative method for ram raiders. There exists a “young-offender military academy” (Morton, 2022, para. 1) style approach. Within this method there lies another layer of institutional control

that repackages the foundations of imprisonment into an approach that persuades critics of the incarceration of youth to consider military academies and “boot camps” (Block, 2022, para. 35). This is shown as a reformed punishment as it does not explicitly show connections to prison environments. The descriptions of “boot camps” (para. 35) focus on disciplining young people through the Defence forces and providing rehabilitation. While maintaining structures towards governing young people and placing the responsibility of reform on them. Rather than recognising influences that may have led youth to offending which could be a product of institutional factors. The articles do not provide insight into any professionals who can address factors concerning mental health and behaviours that have led to youth offending.

The presence of the critics of such programmes becomes highly necessary as they question the accountability of governmental institutions and community organisations. Social workers call for engagement not just from the criminal justice organisations such as the police, but iwi providers and other community-based organisations that can motivate and support youth into positive pathways such as education and employment. Studies show that rehabilitative care in the community leads to advantages of addressing issues (Mallett & Boitel, 2015) and desistance from juvenile crime (Sellers, 2014). This thesis highlights the significance of competing discourses present in the media and the impact it can have on evidence based practices for youth offenders with greater outcomes overall for all.

The Power of the Media - Media as a Panopticon

The media becomes a powerful tool as a modern-day panopticon imposing the values of the subject positions through the discourses portrayed in the media articles. Given the variety of writers behind the articles, there are subject positions from all backgrounds in the midst of everyday tasks. The media as a main structure allows these subject positions to maintain their anonymity while implementing the power of fear in the public that their actions are monitored.

Thus, subject positions are used by the media to make the masses aware of the issue of ram raiders and become authoritarians in seeking justice for the victims by disciplining ram raiders through punitive policies. This thesis highlights that a majority of the positions in the media belong to authority figures in their own fields such as police and politicians, which legitimises their claim of the ram raiders issue and youth crime. However, the presence of a competing discourse includes subject positions that seek alternative measures for young ram raiders such as academics.

Foucault (McHoul & Grace, 1993) recognises educational institutions as possessing disciplinary practices that lead to social control. The researcher questions whether shifting paradigms from criminal justice institutions to educational institutions refocuses the governmentality of young ram raiders to a different institution. Rather than punitive outcomes for youth, they are subject to educational reform which nevertheless controls the behaviour of youth. The media is the overarching institutional structure that ensures power over consequences for young ram raiders as they appeal to audience members of dominant and competing discourses.

The use of a media institution provides subject positions with a platform to enforce control of the masses and practice governmentality over youth, while audiences accept their decisions towards correctional actions for ram raiders. The thesis claims that discourses are powerful enough to regulate public behaviour as they are influenced by societal practices presented in the media.

Implications for Youth Crime Research

Youth crime has been researched by academics through the scope of identifying risk factors through sociological, environmental, and psychological characteristics of youth (Hackman et al., 2021; LeMoine et al., 2015; Muller & Minger, 2013; Steinberg, 2008; Timmer et al., 2022). Despite many of the studies accounting for an individual and community-based approach, the issue of embedded discourses has minimal research on youth crime, specifically ram raiders. This study provides an understanding of a social issue that arises periodically in youth crime. It highlights discourses that shadow the research completed by academics as media institutions can reach a

wider audience. Furthermore, this study examines how the morality of the masses can be manipulated by accessible material in mainstream media to legitimise the understanding of growing youth crimes leading to punitive outcomes for youth. In contrast to the statistical and academic material which portrays that youth crime is declining and constructive interventions are available for young people engaging in crime.

Limitations

The study utilised a Foucauldian discourse analysis approach to examine how youth ram raiders are represented in media. The researcher acknowledges that there are several limitations in the study which could have resulted from personal bias. Despite using reflexivity to account for inherent prejudices and worldviews towards the issue, complete objectivity is unable to be achieved as all personal biases may not have been recognised by the researcher. Further acknowledgement is given to the data being extracted from one news platform. The media protocols and standards used by the company could mean there was prioritisation of certain information to engage a larger number of audience members. The identification of three discourses and a competing discourse has limited the findings of the study as other possible discourses could have been overlooked. This may have occurred as an extensive discussion of the three discourses was required for the study. The representation of minor subject positions has been underrepresented in the results as the study analysed prominent authoritative figures that contributed to the majority of the discourses.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should focus on a variety of newspaper institutions that may portray varying and/or similar discourses presented in this study. The addition of a variety would account for the various procedures used by media institutions and allow for a well-rounded narrative. Moreover, this would allow for an extensive deconstruction of discourses present in the media about ram raiders with recognition of underrepresented discourses. Identification of less significant discourses could highlight the presence of minor subject positions to present their perspective on ram raiders.

Media has influenced public opinion on the social issues present in everyday lives (King et al., 2017). The existence of discourses provided in media leads to societal and political changes that can affect the demographics of a country's landscape. As shown in this study, the subject positions play a role in emphasising discourses that suit their moral code and social agenda. Their rhetoric is fed to the general public and the majority consensus becomes one presented by the institution of media (Fawzi, 2017) and promotes discriminatory behaviour by supporting moral affinity towards anti-minority policies (Maydell et al., 2021).

Hence, framing youth ram raiders as criminals rather than being treated as troubled children can lead to dire effects to the repercussions on youth offenders. Especially, when the media has been known to present certain groups in a negative light such as labelling Pacific islanders as criminals and unmotivated individuals that suffer from health issues (Loto et al., 2006). Whilst, indigenous and immigrant groups are given negative stereotypes which are used to marginalise and other these communities (Allen & Bruce, 2017). This thesis considers that the representations provided in the media are unable to grasp and present the overlapping complexities that could lead youth to ram raiding. Therefore, media policies should be reviewed to reduce the production of opinion pieces that contribute to discourses and become a powerful source in cultivating detrimental perceptions from the public towards ram raiders. These perceptions can lead to policies that affect the treatment of youth and their futures.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study aimed to examine the discursive formations and practices as reflected in the representation of the term *ram raiders* in New Zealand news media. The data showed that the dominant discourse constructed and positioned such people as *criminals* who warranted punishment by an increasingly fearful public and frustrated government. This discourse was supported by the individualisation of youth ram raiders as they became solely responsible for their behaviour and were reprimanded as a result of it.

The addition of the *moral panic* discourse affirmed the power held by media institutions as they can create narratives that emphasise ram raiders as not only mere *criminals* but also an emerging outgroup that is causing concerns in society and threatening civil order without being subject to conspicuous consequences. Despite various statistical evidence showing the decline in youth crime; media reports were able to lead public opinion to believe a moral panic was occurring in society and to increase actions taken on ram raiders. The *outsiders* discourse positioned this group as beyond the community of law-abiding citizens in absolute terms. By centring ram raiders as outsiders labelled as criminals causing a moral panic; compassion towards them was minimised allowing punitive punishments to be more accepted in public view.

Lastly, the competing discourse of ram raiders as *victims* reflected a minor, but important, counter-narrative to the dominant discourses by questioning the legitimacy of the information being presented through media accounts, and re-positioning young people involved in ram raids as persons with complex needs and developmental crises. Despite not receiving the same influential status as the dominant discourses, the victim discourse is significant for future policies and the labelling of youth conducting ram raids as it humanises and supports their perspective. All the while, challenging systematic issues created by institutions.

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