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## Significance

From podcasts, short-form videos, and posts, the true crime genre has grown exponentially on social media. However, in the mix of accurate crime facts and helpful posts that promote victim advocacy, Some "True Crime Junkies" are spreading complete misinformation or vulgar posts that promote personal bias for the perpetrator. This can affect surviving victims of crimes and co-victims (victims loved ones) by causing psychological distress and revictimization.

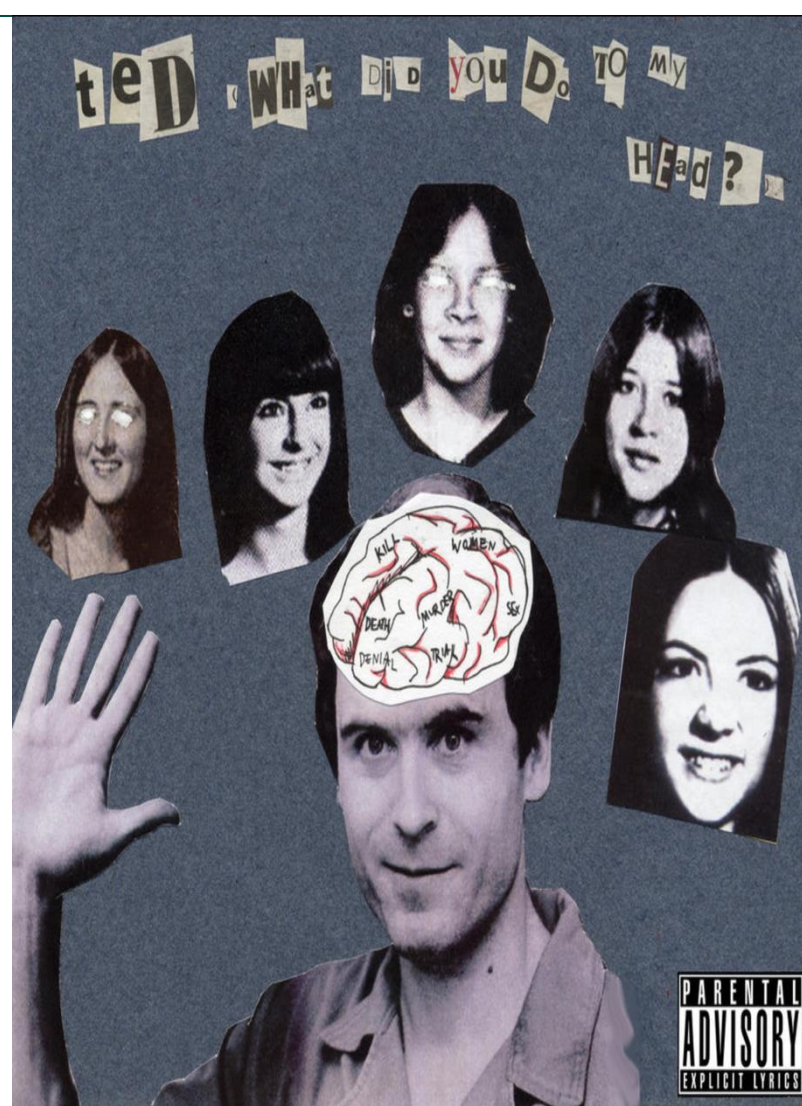


Figure 1- Deviantart.com

## Objective

To educate readers about the mixed ethicality of the true crime content online while also presenting the possible impacts on victims and co-victims from interacting with the true crime fandom.

## True Crime Fandom

The True Crime community or "fandom" is a dark fandom in which a community on multiple social media platforms groups discusses various aspects of the true crime genre (Fathallah, 2024). The topic of Serial killers or mass murders takes up most of the fandom, in which users give their "hot takes" (personal opinions) or ask questions about what occurred during the crimes, the trials, and why the perpetrator committed the crime. Most of the community tries to set boundaries and stay ethical while discussing violent crimes and the victims, usually by setting rules plus adding admins or moderators to patrol incoming posts and comments (Fathallah, 2024). Some participants of the true-crime fandom use more extended forms of content like podcasts to spread information on criminal cases and to promote awareness.

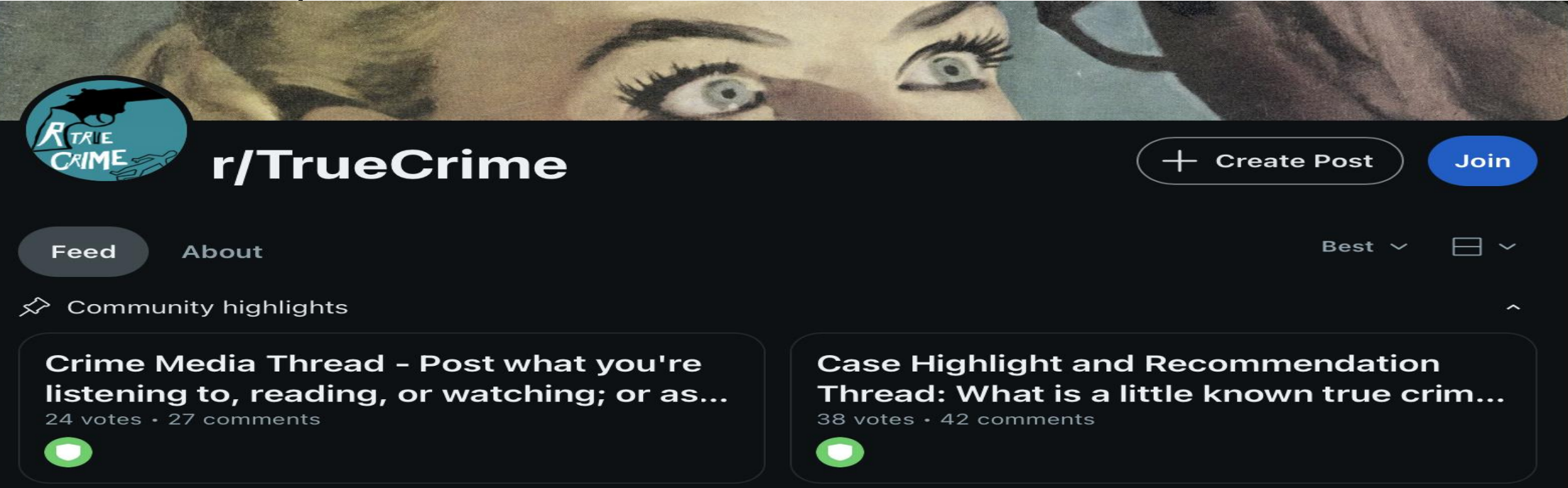


Figure 2- r/ True Crime subreddit on Reddit.com

## Findings

Even with moderators and rules, sections of the true crime community have released a more insensitive and vulgar view of true crime topics. Groups like the "Columbiners" who honor Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the perpetrators of the Columbine massacre (Rico, 2015), blatantly disregard the reality that 13 people died and hundreds of students and families were impacted.

### • Hybristophilia

Many of the posts contain vulgar and graphic material. Either trying to romanticize the criminals, the "bad apples" of the true-crime fandom partake in hybristophilia, which is the sexual attraction to criminals (Gomez et al., 2025). They discuss the desire to date and befriend a particular murderer. Even though most of the criminals they admire are either rotting in prison or dead, they turn to the internet, editing them with hearts and flower crowns to profess their love for their favorite murderer(Rico, 2015).

### • Relatability

Some share posts, deep diving into a certain killer mindset and how they agree with specific worldviews or sympathize with a part of the perpetrator's backstory. Disregarding the vile crimes that the criminal committed. They try to convince users that they could not have been horrible because they had a bad childhood or did something good once (Rico, 2015;Fathalla, 2024). This undermines the murdered victims since they are purposefully undermining the fact that they took and ruined many lives.

### • Trolling

Trolling is when users have nothing left to do with their time, so they post vulgar or "edgy" posts on the internet for attention. If trolling in the true crime genre, trolls usually attack innocent users, victims of violent crimes, and co-victims. For example, Rico (2015) has found that trolls have been known to visit Facebook memorial groups and spam hateful messages that get plastered on the front page of the group for all to see.



Figure 3- Rico, A.R. (2015)



Figure 4- Rico, A.R. (2015)

## Impact on Victims and Co-victims

### • Unwanted Media Attention/ online Harassment

Anytime a new true crime post is uploaded, there is a chance of revictimization to occur, especially when discussing the accused. There is also a possibility that if a crime or post goes viral, victims or co-victims may be hit with unwanted attention by users or the media (Tadros et al., 2024). This is a massive invasion of privacy and can bring back a lot of anxiety and other negative feelings that have been affecting the victim or co-victim since the crime occurred (Tadros et al., 2024). In one instance, The father of Daniel Mauser, a Columbine victim, went on YouTube to address the influx of trolls and Harris and Klebold admirers because they were personally sending him vulgar messages and messing with his child's memorial page (Rico, 2015).

### • Victim Blaming

Suppose a victim or a co-victim decides to speak about their experience. In that case, Their words can be distorted by the true crime community to be used in a more victim-blaming narrative to support the user's own bias or for the sake of trolling (Rico, 2015). This can cause distress to a victim or co-victim trying to inform the public about their experience with going through a tragedy (Tadros et al., 2024).

## Conclusion

Social media users must question the ethicality of their true crime content sources. Content producers must ensure their claims are accurate and avoid glamourizing the perpetrator of the crime.

## References

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