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Paper Gangsters: White Collar and Corporate Crime on Film

THESIS

Submitted to the Department/Faculty of Criminology

For Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for

Master of Criminology

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Abstract

Many of us have never been victims of a serious crime and as a result, rely on the media in its various forms to provide us with information that we can rely on as being accurate in order to learn about it. Information on white-collar crime in the media differs from more common street crime in that it receives very little attention. The lack of attention could be because these crimes are considered non-violent and victimless, are committed by those of high social stature and power and are often complex and challenging to understand. Films can play an important role in creating public awareness through depictions of occupational crime and corporate criminal events. Given the influence public perception has on societal norms, the purpose of this study was to qualitatively identify and analyze common themes in white-collar crime films to detect if and how filmmakers can shape and influence audience views and perceptions of white-collar crimes and criminals. Twenty-three drama genre films were considered for analysis. Numerically, films were split between occupational (10) and corporate crime (13). Grounded theory was used to explore common themes analyzed for their support of theoretical framework, including conflict theories, social constructionism, and labelling theory. The results were consistent with existing white-collar crime and media research. Results also indicate that misinformation and dramatic portrayals tended to manipulate the audience so that they not only supported the criminal activity but rooted for the criminal's success. This finding is concerning as white-collar crime is serious, can have severe detrimental consequences for its victims, and should not be minimized.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| <u>Chapter</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------|
| ABSTRACT | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| CHAPTER 1 – Introduction | 1 |
| CHAPTER 2 – Methodology | 20 |
| CHAPTER 3 – Occupational Crime Narratives | 28 |
| CHAPTER 4 – Corporate Crime Narratives | 49 |
| CHAPTER 5 – Discussion | 73 |
| REFERENCES | 80 |

Chapter 1: Introduction

Corporate and occupational crime is generally a non-violent criminal act, its purpose is to gain wealth and power and these types of crimes can drastically change victims' lives for the worse as the consequences can be immense. That being said, it may be difficult to determine whether somebody is a victim of corporate crime. As a society, we make assumptions about people experiencing poverty or harsh living conditions. The assumption is that factors such as drug or alcohol abuse impact their life chances. However, the inequities of capitalism – an overarching focus on profit over humanity – can further exacerbate poverty and lower socioeconomic conditions. Simply, corporate, and occupational crime is not perceived as warranting serious attention by the criminal justice system, and by those who make the laws. Exposure to corporate crime-related injustices through media-based resources is one way to learn about corporate and white-collar crime, be it through film, news reporting or popular culture. Crime and popular culture are strongly connected as crime is invariably entrenched in all types of media. The two have a formidable connection as crime has an integral presence in the media (Mastrorocco & Minale, 2018). The relationship between crime and film is one to be analyzed and not overlooked in the realm of criminology as it can be beneficial regarding awareness and policy and the dangers involved (Rafter & Brown, 2011).

Corporate crime refers to crimes committed by a corporation or individuals acting on behalf of a corporation or other business entity. The definition of white-collar crime, originated by Edwin Sutherland (1949, p.1) is described as "A crime committed by a person of high social status and respectability in the course of his occupation." Corporate crime and greed negatively impact people's lives regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or class. It can affect

anybody, which makes this type of corruption extremely discomforting. Not only does this damage victims financially, but this will inevitably have a detrimental effect on the mental and emotional state of those who experience it.

The crimes driven by corporate greed can be debilitating to its victims. Many facets of criminology have dominated the media due to the fascination people tend to have with crime. There have been countless studies on the media and violence, moral panics, and causality of damages in general (Rafter & Brown 2011). Films of the drama genre that portray corporate criminal acts are a common way that corporate crime awareness is delivered to the public. Corporate crime films in this genre highlight the wrongdoings of big corporations and how they take advantage of and damage society. Not only can these crimes impact victims financially, but there is also physiological and emotional impact. It can be difficult to fully grasp the gravity of the repercussions of white-collar or corporate crime by watching the news or reading statistics, however these films can effectively present the emotional factors that of committing crime as well as being victimized by crime. For example, if you are taken advantage of financially, this could result in not providing the housing you and your family need or providing healthy food for your loved ones to eat (Rafter & Brown, 2011).

Typically, white-collar and corporate crimes and criminals do not garnish the punishment that they deserve in the justice system if they are held responsible at all (Cox, Edens, Rulseh & Clark, 2016). For example, big corporations can bypass laws allowing them to pollute our air and water by disposing of harmful waste and substances without proper precautions in place, which hurts society on a much more macro level (Rafter & Brown, 2011; Sutherland, 1940; Leighton, 2013). Those in powerful positions and in the criminal justice

system tend to overlook these crimes because of the conflicting views of crime held by those in power. Unfortunately, how the law determines penalty for crimes are not classless or unbiased.

Due to social constructionism, we have images and ideologies of what a criminal looks like, and repeatedly, corporate greed and wrongdoings are overlooked due to the non-violent nature and because they are generally committed by those who are wealthy, educated, upper class and of Caucasian descent (Rafter & Brown, 2011). Based on the limited amount of attention that is stressed upon corporate crimes and the characteristics of those responsible, the justice system as a whole tends to be lax when it comes to the severity of the penalty, if indeed a penalty is given at all. Regularly, the courts penalize the criminal and not the crime itself, and there should be more emphasis and pressure placed on the justice system to administer punishment correctly and fairly (Cox et al., 2016; Leighton, 2013).

It is important to present a media portrayal of corporate crime because it is, for the most part, not visible in everyday life. One cannot determine corporate malfeasance as a reason for someone's downfall. Often, the crimes are complex and difficult to understand, leaving the public unaware of the crimes committed. Often films and other types of media can be a learning tool for people who do not quite understand the criminal event and what criminal or unethical behaviour caused it. Because corporate malfeasance is not a 'common, regular, street crime,' there is a lack of public awareness among these types of crimes. We often learn about corporate corruption and greed through media, such as films, television shows, editorials, or popular culture. The purpose of this study is to further enhance its reader's perceptions of corruption in the corporate world and the lasting effects it has on those who experience it. Too often, the victims of white-collar crime are faceless, just groups of employees

or a segment of the population, often nameless. Criminology and popular culture are at the helm of society's renditions or, more simply, our characterizations of what we conjure up to be a criminal in our minds (Rafter & Brown, 2011).

Depictions of crime on the screen help us shape and mould the characterizations of criminal behaviour (Rafter et al., 2011). The relationship between crime and film will hopefully encourage society to become more aware and discerning of potential threats through white-collar or corporate means. Any information concerning white-collar and corporate greed and the portrayals of those who perpetrate it in the media is imperative to the field of criminology because it is yet another factor or avenue that crimes are committed. Any wrongdoing that affects even one person needs to be taken seriously and analyzed to the best of our ability. It is paramount for people to learn about the red flags among those active in the corporate world to avoid potential harm.

"Law is like a cobweb; it's made for flies and the smaller kinds of insects, so to speak, but let's the big bumblebees breakthrough. When technicalities of the law stood in my way, I have always been able to brush them aside easy as anything." Railway Financier, Daniel Drew in (Sutherland, 1949 p. 8-9).

Background

The term 'white-collar crime' was coined in the 1930s by criminologist Edwin Sutherland. Sutherland sought to label a general theory of crime committed by those who were respected and were of a higher social status than those who traditionally committed crimes – the impoverished and socially deprived. What started even before Sutherland's time as simple

cases of employee theft and selling faulty or non-existent products has today come to include complicated financial crimes such as fraud and embezzlement, corruption, bribery and environmental pollution, to name a few; perpetrated by individuals, corporations and governments. Because he was the first to theorize and study white-collar crime, it is important to review how Sutherland explained his definition and the importance of recognizing white-collar crime as a serious criminal activity and not merely a part of doing business before moving on to the position of white-collar crime today.

In his 1940 paper, Sutherland addresses a number of concerns surrounding criminality and justice of what is considered a white-collar crime. He stresses that criminality exists, to such an extent in all white-collar occupations that in casual conversation, one can ask these people, “what crooked practices are found in your occupation?” (Sutherland, 1940; p. 2).

Sutherland asserts the seriousness of white-collar crime as:

The financial loss from white-collar crime, great as it is, is less important than the damage to social relations. White-collar crimes violate trust and therefore, create distrust, which lowers social morale and produces social disorganization on a large scale. Other crimes produce relatively little effect on social institutions or social organization (p.5).

Sutherland believed that calling these behaviours a crime was not intended to make them appear worse, just as not calling them a crime should make them appear better.

However, they violate the law. Therefore, crime has been committed. He also pointed out that crimes, regardless of class, should be treated equally in the sense that they should be recorded as crimes even if they have been decided by a board, commission, or agency so as not to skew sample bias of researchers and risk the under-estimation of white-collar criminal offences. Of concern, laws against the two criminal classes are implemented differently. Crimes of the lower

class such as burglary or murder are punished through fines, imprisonment, or death. In contrast, those committed by the upper class are punished with warnings, orders to cease and desist, occasionally a loss of professional license. In extreme cases, fines, and possible prison (Sutherland, 1940) because white-collar criminals are handled independently of traditional criminals, they are left unaccounted for as criminals to themselves, the public, and criminologists (Sutherland, 1940).

Offender characteristics Sutherland posits that white-collar criminals are in positions of power in which they are respected and thus rewarded with unaccountability or, when necessary, can influence laws through political connections and bribery. Lower class criminals in contrast, hold no power and are subject to accept and endure any sentence or punishment disposed on them.

Sutherland also addresses victimology, in white-collar crimes. Victims are considered weak, less informed, and unable to protect themselves (Sutherland, 1940). He recalls railroad financier Daniel Drew taking a large sum of money from Vanderbilt, whose wealth was also built on railroads and shipping. Drew determined that it was a mistake to have taken money from someone as equally powerful as he, and concluded that he would in the future target those who were considered outsiders from all over the country who would not be able to organize and fight back; which Sutherland likens to 'stealing candy from a baby' which essentially gives them immunity from the law (Sutherland, 1940; p.10).

Interestingly, embezzlement laws were passed in the 15th century, long before Sutherland published his work on white-collar crime. Embezzlement differs from theft in that although they both involve stealing, embezzlement specifically addresses stealing something

that one's employer has entrusted you with, making the employer the victim. An example of this could be an employee stealing funds from the cash register that they are responsible for. Hence, the powerful refused to be victimized long before individual victims obtained protections from employers! (Sutherland, 1940; Dictionary of Business and Management, p.113). Much of Sutherland's representation of white-collar crime is still relevant today, and criminologists have continued to study the evolved field of occupational and corporate crime.

Understanding the White-Collar Criminal

Both occupational and corporate crime is considered a white-collar crime. However, occupational crimes are often committed by employees or persons who are neither rich nor powerful (Simpson, 2019), and powerful, faceless conglomerates often commit corporate crimes considered 'too big to fail and too big to jail' (Garrett, 2014; Simpson, 2019). Sutherland recognized that criminal records and statistics excluded most white-collar crimes, both occupational and corporate, and indeed, researchers still find this to be the case (Garrett, 2014). Some argue that it is difficult to theorize white-collar crimes because it encompasses too many distinctly different behaviours. However, there is agreement that all types of white-collar crimes are rational, thoughtful acts, not crimes of passion (Garrett, 2014; Simpson, 2019). The objective of the majority of white-collar criminals, both occupational and corporate, is economic gain or occupational advancement that will lead to economic growth gain (Coleman, 1987).

It is widely accepted that most white-collar criminals typically have no psychological issues or unusual socialization history that would explain their motivation to commit a crime. A

common theory of criminality used to understand the motives of white-collar criminals is interactionist theory, although some researchers have developed alternative views (Coleman, 1987; Simpson, 2019; Sutherland, 1940). A critical element of interactionist theory is societal expectations of behaviour, which contradicts criminal behaviour. This is explained by the mechanism of self-denial used by most occupational criminals, which enables them to maintain a non-deviant self-image (Cressey, 1971). For example, Cressey (1971) interviewed convicted embezzlers who claimed they had only borrowed the money and were planning on returning it and that they saw nothing wrong with using the money to help themselves and then returning it and hurting no one. A common reason for not feeling guilt among occupational and corporate criminals was that no one was hurt, and for corporations specifically, governments were blamed for too much regulation, there was no personal gain, and they needed to ensure a healthy bottom line for their company and employees (Coleman, 1987).

Popular Culture Narratives

Media is the architect of pop culture – it moulds and creates public opinion and perception on many societal topics, including crime. As the significant influencer of people and minds, media provides the public with virtually all of the information they can consume on crime from such sources as the internet, film, television, novels, news, and music. The power of media's ability to provide social learning causes concern when it negatively contributes to shaping beliefs and misconceptions about minorities, ethnic groups, sex roles, to name a few, through and modelling of stereotypes (Bandura, 2001). Bandura (2001) further determined that although people have stable social and moral behaviour standards, they still experience

constant social learning through their environment. However, social learning most often pertains to human values, approaches to thought, and mass media provide behaviour. The view that realities are constructed through representation in the media is also supported by research conducted by Appel and Richter (2007) who concluded that it is possible that views of the world can be altered by fictional information, even if it is false. A world filled with false information can cause concern for the health and safety of its people. They further suggest that persisting fictional narratives will continue to persuade views and beliefs to greater extents over more extended periods (Appel et al., 2007). According to Hoffman (2013), the representations provided by the media by which individuals form their opinions and beliefs of the social and political world, ultimately influence what we know and how we know it. Considerable research has established that representations provided by the media can indeed affect public opinion, social realities, public perception and views (Bandura, 2001; Appel & Richter, 2007; Hoffman, 2013; Rafter & Brown, 2011; Ribstein, 2012).

The media's influence and therefore popular culture also shapes how the public views crime (Dowler, Fleming & Muzzatti, 2006; Barlow, Barlow & Chiricos, 1995; Paultz, 2014; Rafter, 2007; Rafter & Brown, 2011; Welsh, Fleming & Dowler, 2011).

CRIME AND MEDIA

People have long been fascinated with crime, from 19th Century Jack the Ripper to Bonnie and Clyde, Al Capone, O.J. Simpson. Seemingly, the media provides an unlimited supply of crime content to satisfy their pursuit of ratings and advertising dollars. Films, in particular, provide a unique representation of crime that is not often possible in other media outlets. Most

viewers who watch films for entertainment purposes are not aware that the films are shaping their perceptions on any number of topics, regardless of the movie's content (Paultz, 2014). Despite being fictional, films can represent a realism that makes their content appear authentic and provide social learning (Bandura, 1994; Paultz, 2014). Viewers feel they understand such things as catastrophic events that never have and will probably never happen to them. One of the reasons that films can often control the popular culture narrative is the sheer number of their audience. According to Paultz, 2014, “more than two-thirds of the American and Canadian populations –68% or 225 million—went to the movies at least once in 2012. This is further evidence of the ability of the cinema to attract a sizable audience” and (Rafter, 2007, p.214) states “Popular criminology audience is bigger (even a cinematic flop will reach a larger audience than this article)” referring to her academic article, *Crime, Film and Criminology*.

As much as film shapes society, society contributes to shaping film as well. Filmmakers and movie studios are also businesses that rely on providing the audience what they want which is often in conjunction with popular culture, ‘current attitudes and tensions’ (Welsh et al., 2011; Hansen & Magnussen, 2018) and the media (films) provide this as well. Examples of this are a desire for strong female characters (Jones, Bajac-Carter & Batchelor, 2014), characters that embody certain racial qualities (Childs, 2014), or mature actors that appeal to an ageing population (Casado, 2020). Audiences do not just show preferences in character depictions but the actual plots themselves. Research has demonstrated that people favour media that agree with their beliefs in justice, where characters are determined to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and those characters are respectively rewarded or punished (Welsh, et al., 2011; Raney, 2005). ‘Good guys’ winning and ‘bad guys’ losing is the desired justice narrative.

Research has also identified empathy as a 'key mechanism' which determines how viewers perceive a character's moral judgement – those that empathized with a character who makes poor decisions were perceived as a 'good guy' even though their actions may not be considered moral (Raney, 2005). According to (Raney, 2005), viewers also judge characters and decide whether they are liked or disliked based on whether they believe the character's actions are right or wrong throughout the film. In the end, they decide the degree to which they are liked or disliked. As the viewer follows the narrative and assesses the moral judgements of the character, the viewer's level of enjoyment of the film is determined (Raney, 2005; Zillmann, 2000). In his study on predicting viewers' enjoyment of a film. Raney (2005) found that "simply stated, the theories predict that enjoyment increases when liked characters experience positive outcomes, when disliked characters experience negative outcomes, or when both occur." The study also found that when the outcome is reversed and "liked characters are met with misfortune, and disliked characters are met with good fortune, or when both occur, enjoyment decreases." It is noteworthy that this study supports viewers enjoyment levels while watching frightening, action, reality-based crime-based, and news programming. OK, so what should we take away from Raney's work?

Crime, Film and Popular Culture

According to Welsh et al., (2011), cultural criminology is a growing field that considers "films and other media sources as cultural products" that provide understanding into these "shared meanings about crime," and (Barlow et al., 1995) states that "social, political and cultural significance of media" is an expanding area of the criminology field. (Katz, 2016) breaks

down the types of crime culture into three subtypes, which include those who describe the crime as unbiased observers by producing official statistics, news media reports, or academic studies; those who are admitted offenders and provide first-hand accounts of how and why they became criminals; and those that are considered entertainment, which includes fiction, documentaries, or comedy. Film in particular, is an essential source of information on crime, especially those crimes that are considered uncommon, such as occupational or corporate crime that the public is less familiar with than traditional crimes (Welsh, et al., 2011; Rafter, 2007). Welsh et al., (2011) refer to the general assumption that people identify more easily with visual culture than with the written word, concluding that views and perceptions are more readily shaped through visual culture. For example, an individual attempting to understand a complicated corporate crime would have an easier time doing that if the crime were enacted in a film.

As stated by Dowler et al. (2006), crime has become a significant component of North American popular culture due to the public's pre-occupation with criminality. Crime as entertainment has become our version of reality, which determines how we think about crime, how we interpret crimes, how we view criminals, our views on justice, and how we solve crimes. Crime has become such a tremendous part of popular culture that there is almost no light between it and academic criminology; the difference being that academic scholars may form their opinions from the lessons of traditional criminology, but the vast majority of people form their opinions about crime from popular culture (Rafter et al., 2011; Rafter, 2007). Given the fact that research has determined that the media contributes tremendously to the construction of social phenomena (Welsh et al., 2011), further examination of how crime and

justice are portrayed in film is warranted, notably in those situations where there are no information sources, or sources are scarce. Rafter et al., (2011, p.4) take this suggestion further by stating, “criminological theory is all around us – in daily conversation, news media, prime time television, music, cyberspace, mystery novels and film. It is increasingly difficult to ignore the explanations of criminal behaviour generated so powerfully by movies, novels, television and other cultural discourses. Films can vividly depict how people caught within worlds of crime and victimization cope and ultimately survive, for better or worse,” meaning that there is so much rich material in films, why not just use it? Another important point made by Rafter et al., (2011) is that a significant aspect of crime that can for the most part only be presented visually is left out of academic criminology— the aspect of emotion. According to Rafter, this includes “the pain of crime, victims feeling of having lost control, the anger, the sense of loss, the fear” (Rafter, p.185). Equally important and absent from academic criminology is the portrayal of the criminal, which often can explain the behaviour, and the context in which it occurs, which would allow for interpretation (Rafter et al., 2011; Rafter, 2007).

Previous studies have captured the significance of film in society, specifically films that are critical of business and/or feature corporate and occupational misconduct. One hundred and forty-three films were analyzed by Ribstein (2012), and in this study he determined that the reason film makers exhibit negative views of business in their movies, is not because they care to inform their viewers about the nefariousness of business activities, or that they are on the side of the workers; film makers are merely communicating their own dislike of the capitalists who fund and therefore control the movie business and stifle their artistic endeavours. In a way, this is their own David vs. Goliath story—the small independent artist up against big

business. Ribstein, (2012) also provided examples of how films accomplish their influence on political views, which in turn effect regulations on business by referring to films that have directly altered communitarian attitudes on such things as unions, insider trading, and corporate pollution. In their study, Hansen et al., (2018) followed the themes of business in films from 1928 to 2016 in conjunction with the historical events and the sentiments of society during each of the time periods. They found that the vast majority of the films tended to represent business as a reflection of the way business was currently being viewed by society. As an example, the period between 1928 and 1940 was burdened with the stock market crash of 1929, the depression that followed and the beginning of World War II causing great doubt and disbelief in business and the financial system. Not surprisingly, the researchers found that there were many films made about business during that period, most of which provided a gloomy image. Those that did not, focused on the value of family, community, and small businesses (Hansen et al., 2018). When the war was over and businesses were needed for rebuilding America and to provide good jobs and income for families, the positive view that society had for business made its way into the film industry as well and business was re-legitimized on the screen. By the 1970's, economic and social woes of society once again spilled over to the cinematic world and business was again the target of negative narratives. These results continued with the ebb and flow of the economic and social climates of the periods studied to 2016. The results of Hansen and Magnussen's research is significant in that it provides proof over a long period of time that there is little light between the views of society and the themes found in films, and clearly demonstrates the influence they have on one another.

Theoretical Framework

Social Constructionism Theory

Social Constructionism theory is dependent on the thought that our reality is learned and shaped for us, not discovered by us independently. Human beings throughout our history have *created* societal norms that we accept and adhere to as our reality. Important to note that because society creates and constructs what we consider reality, as society changes, so do our opinions and our reality. The social construction of attitudes pertaining to white-collar crime may contribute to the unequal treatment in the justice system between white collar criminals and more common criminals. According to Griffin (2002), in his research on securities enforcement in the United States, the mere fact that white-collar criminals are named as such, as opposed to being called regular criminals like all others, causes them to be treated more leniently by the criminal justice system. Griffin (2002) holds academia partly responsible for creating the white-collar image of what he refers to as nothing more than members of organized crime, and believes that criminal behavior should not be segmented into socially constructed groups based on the characteristics of the offenders. Social constructionism theory is especially pertinent in the area of criminology because defined by those in power, and reflecting their values and views, laws are made, and punishments are rendered. As a result, historically, white-collar criminals have been treated leniently by courts due to their high social and financial stature and often holding positions of power.

Labelling Theory

Labelling theory is based on the notion that those who commit crimes do so because of the way they have been characterized or perceived by those around them, most often by public opinion or by those in powerful positions such as in the justice system. The theory posits that if one has been labelled by others as a thief, degenerate, and loser, that person will, in turn, identify as these things and continue or begin to behave in the way they have been labelled. If they are led to believe that there is nothing more to their identity than that which they have been labelled with, they will continue to validate those opinions through their actions. Suppose a negative label is continually imposed on a person. In that case, the impact can be that they believe themselves to be deviant, which can contribute to feelings of worthlessness and a general negative self-concept (Kubrin et al., 2009). Not all labelling has a negative effect on individuals. Those labelled as powerful, smart, or a winner, also tend to behave in ways that validate that label. Labelling is a commonly used criminological theory when determining the causes of an individual's continued criminality, but this can pertain both to negative labels and positive ones. The negative labels are self-explanatory, but the positive labels can theoretically be negatively associated with corporate and white-collar criminals.

It can be argued that those who commit white-collar crimes excuse their actions because of the positions of power that they occupy. The wealthy also tends to excuse others in their group for criminal actions because of the power imbalance between the white-collar criminals and their victims. Labelling theory is just as much about the power dynamic in society as it is about individuals. Society tends to make assumptions of people based on how much money they have; if they have money, they must be important, and honest and trustworthy.

Those who lead a life of corporate crime do not 'look' like the 'common' criminal who commits theft or drug-related offences. They usually wear suits, drive expensive cars, spend time in extravagant social settings and so forth. Therefore, society doesn't adversely treat these people. Most of the time, these people are admired (Van Antwerp, 2011), often even if they have been found to have committed a crime. It may be quite easy for a corporate criminal to excuse the consequences and losses that their crimes have had on their victims, be it money, their home, their business, their health, or even their life, as an anonymous act viewed as nothing more than 'the cost of doing business.' The positive labels that society has placed on these people allow them to believe they are better than others and worthy of being excused of their unlawful actions.

Conflict Theories

Conflict theories highlight the imbalance of power and inequality in the justice system. Common questions that arise from conflict theories are: Why are some offenders labelled as criminals while others are not? Why do the poor struggle with crime more often than the upper class? Why are some crimes in general not perceived as severe criminal acts while others are? According to Kubrin et al. (2009), "at the heart of conflict theory is a concern with social injustice." At some point in time or places around the world, acts such as prostitution, gambling, and drug use are considered legal, whereas, in other areas, these offences are met with severe punishment. For example, if we lack consensus and communal values, how can we judge one crime from another?

Most importantly, it appears that it depends on who is committing these crimes. Conflict theories also address the issue of unequal punishment for crimes committed by the powerful and elite and the crimes committed by ordinary people. Perhaps an explanation for the lack of attention or coverage in the mainstream media regarding white-collar and corporate crimes is because wealthy, upper-class, white men are predominantly committing them. For the most part, corporate or white-collar crimes are discussed or portrayed only through film, which is why it is essential to view and gain knowledge about those who commit the crimes, how they commit these crimes, as well as the effects that these criminal acts can have on victim's lives.

Conclusion

Much about how we perceive, learn, report and deal with corporate and occupational crime has changed since Edwin Sutherland coined the term 'white-collar crime.' Sutherland could not have predicted the significance of the media's role in shaping our views and opinions about all types of crime and criminals. Focusing on and studying the depiction of crime in film is important because, for the vast majority of the public, this is how we vicariously experience it. In turn, we use this experience to shape our societal views on topics such as laws, politics, law enforcement, public safety and criminality. The power of the media and specifically film, should not be underestimated in its ability to shape public opinion on virtually any subject. In addition, films play an important role in educating the public that print and news media do not. Most people find it much easier to understand new concepts or complicated events visually and through dramatization. Corporate and occupational crime, which evolved from the more general term of white-collar crime, has become a vast category that includes environmental

crimes, corporate fraud, securities fraud, money laundering and cybercrime, to name a few.

Many of these types of crimes are complicated and only meaningful to the public when they are understood through the structured narrative of film. Edward Sutherland postulated that white-collar crime was far more financially detrimental to society than everyday street crime. Today, this has indeed proven to be accurate, as the estimated annual cost of white-collar crime in the U.S. is approximately \$1 trillion, compared with \$15 billion for street crime. This is in addition to the long-term effects of white-collar crime on society as a whole as the public loses trust and faith in its institutions. Sutherland has been proven correct in his representation of the importance of holding corporations, organizations and elite individuals, once considered beyond reproach, accountable for their criminal actions. Increased public awareness made possible through the power of the media, and specifically film, is helping to facilitate this.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter will present the methodological strategies that were executed throughout the research process. The section begins with an outline of the research questions that guided and shaped the research process and the films used for data analysis. Following this, I will then discuss the methodological approach that was utilized to examine the data. Lastly, this section will explain an overview of the data sample and show how the findings translate to my research topic.

Research Questions

There are many facets to the data collected. However, the primary goal of the research topic was to examine the portrayal of corporate crime, corruption, and greed in the films. The research questions are created around the study's aim to identify the themes that dominate films that focus on corporate and occupational crime.

Question 1.

Because of the apparent ability of media to manipulate and shape the views and opinions of society, does it feel as though the films are attempting to guide the narrative and manipulate the viewer to feel one way or another about either the victim or the perpetrator or both?

Question 2.

Given that films are produced first and foremost to entertain and attract audiences for profit, are the films viewed also able to inform and capture the significance of the crimes committed? If so, are the crimes and storylines realistic and representative of real-life events and outcomes?

Question 3.

A common quip in news media is “if it bleeds, it leads.” White-collar crimes are not considered violent and typically receive very little or no press coverage at all. Because the crimes themselves are ignored, so too are the victims of these crimes. In the films viewed, do the victims get the attention that they deserve? Is the audience made fully aware of the serious outcomes derived from various forms of white-collar crime?

Question 4.

The media is notorious for stereotyping individuals. What are the patterns of character development/characterizations in white-collar films? For example, are all of the perpetrators alike? Are the victims similar to each other?

Question 5.

White-collar crimes differ from street crimes. They are often very complicated and intricate, and often only those who are part of a certain industry easily understand the crime committed. For this reason, white-collar crimes may go undetected, under-reported and without consequences. Do the films in the sample do their part to educate the viewer on the ‘mechanics’ of the crime committed? Can the viewer understand the crime, how it was committed, and why it was committed? Or are the crime details glossed over to focus on an alternate storyline, such as a love story?

Sample

The analysis for this research will be conducted using movies and film. The films were selected based on the plot line's criteria focused on white-collar crime, specifically corporate wrongdoing, or occupational crime. The sample was derived from a search on imdb.com and boxofficemojo.com. The study includes 23 Hollywood films, thirteen focusing on corporate wrongdoing and ten on occupational crime. These films include:

Table 1

Film Titles and Genre

| CORPORATE CRIME FILMS | OCCUPATIONAL CRIME FILMS |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Dark Waters (2019) | The Wolf of Wall Street (2013) |
| Erin Brockovich (2000) | Wall Street (1987) |
| The Informant (2009) | The Wizard of Lies (2017) |
| Class Action (1991) | Rogue Trader (1998) |
| Silkwood (1983) | Hudsucker Proxy (2000) |
| The China Syndrome (1979) | Boiler Room (2000) |
| The Insider (1999) | Owning Mahowny (2003) |
| Deepwater Horizon (2016) | Billionaire Boys Club (2018) |
| Too Big to Fail (2011) | Wall Street 2: Money Never Sleeps (2010) |
| Gold (2016) | Equity (2016) |
| A Civil Action (1998) | |
| The Crooked E: The Unshredded Truth About Enron (2003) | |
| The Big Short (2015) | |

Methodological Approach

I utilized grounded theory for my qualitative content analysis since the coding process helped discover themes in the films. This method was valuable as it allowed me to discover

codes (initial & focused coding) that I could add to or reduce later on as I wanted my methods to be flexible and be able to generate what I found are the most prominent themes in the data; these are classified as emergent processes (Charmaz, 2014). Although these two methods differ, they are alike in their coding process and categorization of themes in the data but do overlap in some respects.

Data Analysis (or Analytic Induction)

The first step in the data collection process was watching the films. I wanted to watch each film one time before taking notes about the events happening throughout the film. When I completed this process for each film and constructed the codes, and applied data analysis, I then instituted the analytic induction. This research strategy aims to develop explanations for the data, therefore, my conclusions are based on and discovered through the collection. As I progressed through the required films, I found numerous similarities, resulting in themes emerging. In other words, I used these films to observe and derive any themes that arose from the data. The films were integral to developing my theory, therefore using an inductive analytical approach was applicable as it allowed me to draw conclusions based on the content in the films. After viewing each of the films the first time (so I had a good comfort level with the material), I watched them a second time while writing down the plot synopsis scene by scene and jotting down initial codes. Once this was completed, I would then watch the film for a third time, gathering quotations from the film that I felt showcased the film's most important and impactful themes. During this stage, I would continue to record the initial codes that emerged from the film.

Initial Coding

The first phase of coding was initial coding completed while watching each of the films once through. I began the second stage of coding during the second viewing. This is part of developing the codebook, which became extremely valuable. The point of this stage was not to overthink. I wanted to keep the information general and write down all details I observed on the screen; As Charmaz states, “Our initial codes give us possible paths to take our analyses” (Charmaz, 2014). This stage of research is all about finding possibilities. At this point, there was no indication as to which themes were going to appear prominently in the data and therefore, all options needed to be listed. It was also important to remain open-minded, as I did not want to narrow or limit the information as this would jeopardize the data collection process. As stated, all possibilities were ‘on the table.’ At the end of this initial coding process, I had a thorough codebook that provided some noticeable points but was rich in information.

Focused Coding

Having completed the initial coding, I advanced to the focused coding stage. This step is described as the discarding or recognizing the recurrent, most important codes. It was determined that the themes that appeared more prevalent and present in the films were the most important. This is essential to the data analysis. It is important to determine which of these many collected codes from the initial coding process are most valuable or relevant to the research. Focused coding is essentially a decision-making process because it calls for eliminating or at least putting certain information on the ‘back burner’ (Charmaz, 2014). As the data analysis moved forward, it became clear which codes were deemed vital as they continued to occur frequently, making them more significant and deserving of greater attention.

There is also a component of the focused coding process that is referred to as Axial Coding. Axial coding aims to relate categories to subcategories and help construct relationships among the codes (Charmaz, 2014). Because this was a media analysis and the sample were films, I felt that there were a lot of different types of codes that seemed unrelated. However, they did apply. There are many layers to a film, and I decided that the best way to make sense of the data was to categorize them. For example, a form of corporate-level indifference to human life may be presented as environmental harm. However, it could also be presented as the corporation's denial to assist or efforts to deny victims the justice they seek. The concept of greed is also depicted in many different ways. When the 23 films in the sample were analyzed and coded, they were reviewed multiple times to ensure no frequent codes were overlooked.

Memo Writing

Charmaz states that this is a “pivotal and intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (Charmaz, 2014 p.72). The intended goal of memo writing is to provide a space to solidify the answers to questions regarding the codes throughout data analysis. From beginning to end of the research process, a memo journal was kept to help keep track of connections between codes. Memo writing is intended to make the researcher consider all of the available avenues when deciding on the data collected. This is all part of manifesting the theory that will be explored in the write-up. Even though the focused coding process is complete, how do we now understand what the collection is saying?

Even though analytical memos are the last part of executing grounded theory, there was always a present element throughout the data analysis. Because I had categories related to subcategories, I was always noting how these themes crossed over. Because I had a significant

number of codes, it was important that I analyzed and made sense of what I had found in the sample. I asked myself questions such as what do these codes show? What do these codes mean? How will they be defined? Essentially, processing and working through these memos help create my theory as these will have been the most emergent components of the data used when I do the write-up.

Memo writing is essentially a time for a detailed review to truly digest and make sense of the codes and their categories to grasp a complete understanding of the data results. By doing this, “it will crystallize questions and directions for a researcher to pursue” (Charmaz, 2014 p.72), and through memo writing, I will assess the codes, sort categories, find detail, and identify any gaps (Charmaz, 2014).

Overview of the Sample

The sample used for the research consisted of 23 films, all considered white-collar crime films. Stratified sampling was used, as the intent was to compare the relationships between the two sub-groups of white-collar crime films, corporate crime and occupational crime. Thirteen of the films focused on crimes committed by corporations, and ten of the films portrayed occupational crimes. The films in each group were chosen randomly, with the only specific criteria being that they were considered ‘recent’ in terms of their theatre release dates. This criterion was necessary as the research study needed to be relevant to modern-day crimes, present-day media use, and represent modern filmmaking. All of the films would be considered popular with movie-goers, and all but 7 of the 23 were released after the year 2000.

Limitations

One deficiency with the methodology was that the researcher was constrained by the nature of the sample to take an interpretive approach as films can have different effects on individual viewers. Individuals in an audience can have differing opinions and thoughts on a film, and for this reason, results could be considered biased. However, the researcher began the study with no expectations of the results and used only analytical and judgemental applications based on what could be considered the most common interpretation of each of the films.

Conclusion

This section has described and justified the research methodology that was implemented in this study. The researcher chose to use a qualitative method due to the nature of the sample chosen and the research topic. The nature of the sample necessitated the use of an interpretive approach by the researcher. Films were the only research sample in the study, but there were 23 films viewed, divided by type of corporate crime – corporate or occupational. The samples were carefully but randomly chosen using criteria that consisted of recent release dates of the film, subject of the film (white-collar crime) and more specifically divided somewhat equally by white-collar corporate crime and white-collar occupational crime. Coding was implemented to capture the data that was to be analyzed. The results of the research and findings will be documented and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Occupational Crime Narratives

In the crime film genre, occupational crime offers a unique narrative that provides audiences with a gaze into the motivations of the white-collar criminal. Essentially, the occupational crime genre of film offers a form of escapist entertainment, in which the protagonist engages in financial crime to achieve the 'American Dream.' This is a common theme in many types of film, where the seemingly "good" characters attempt to improve their standing within the world in which they occupy. Many films celebrate the American Dream, with noble ideas of becoming a successful entrepreneur and achieving material wealth. However, the American Dream can also be distorted in film, depicting greed, corruption, and immorality.

Results

In this study of ten films that depicted occupational there were portrayals of insider trading, bank fraud, stock manipulation, and pump and dump schemes where penny stocks are pumped up and sold to an unsuspecting public, causing the price to rise at which time the brokers sell their own shares leaving victims with worthless stocks. The characters used dishonest and unscrupulous methods to cheat their way to the upper echelon of the financial world, with resultant levels of material wealth and extravagant lifestyles. In this study, several narratives were prominently featured in occupational crime films, which include (1) Down on their Luck (2) The Ah-Ha Moment (Life Altering Moment), (3) Redemption (4) The Cover-Ups (5) Cooperation & Collaboration and (6) Glamourization.

Table 2

Correlations Between Occupational Crime Films and Themes

| FILM | Down on Their Luck | The 'Ah-Ha' or Life Altering Moment | Character Transformation/Redemption | Element of Cover Up/Uncovering of Sinister Plot | Cooperating With Law Enforcement | Glamourization of Greed |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| The Wolf of Wall Street (2013) | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Wall Street (1987) | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| The Wizard of Lies (2017) | | | | X | X | |
| Rogue Trader (1998) | X | X | X | X | | |
| The Hudsucker Proxy (2000) | X | X | X | X | | X |
| Boiler Room (2000) | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Billionaire Boys Club (2018) | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Owning Mahowny (2003) | | | | X | | |
| Wall Street 2: Money Never Sleeps (2010) | | X | X | X | | X |
| Equity (2016) | X | | X | X | X | X |

(1) Down on their luck

The down on their luck narrative is a common theme in the occupational crime films. In many films, the protagonist is depicted as unsuccessful at the beginning of the film, and their dreams of success appear hopeless. This allows the viewer to sympathize with the character while also illustrating motivation for the subsequent criminal behaviour. Film producers utilize this technique to 'draw' the viewers into the storyline and give the audience a character to 'root' for and identify. For instance, the 'down on their luck' narrative appeared in seven of the ten occupational crime films. In *Boiler Room (2000)*, Seth Davis (Giovanni Ribisi) is determined to make money. At the beginning of the film, Seth runs an illegal casino from his house that he rents with other university students. He is a disappointment to his father, an integral part of the storyline and his motivation to become a criminal. Similarly, *Billionaire Boys Club (2018)* features two protagonists failing in their careers and discontent in their lives. Dany Karny (Taron Egerton) is a young and ambitious yet ultimately unsuccessful car salesman. At the same time, Joe Hunt (Ansel Elgort) is a struggling employee at the Pacific Stock Exchange who is desperate for money and to move out of his dad's home. *The Hudsucker Proxy (1994)* features Norville Barnes (Tim Robbins), a recent business graduate that has difficulty securing employment due to lack of experience. While Nick Leeson (Ewen McGregor) is depicted as a lowly bank clerk in *Rogue Trader (1999)*. Conversely, *Equity (2016)* features senior-level banker Naomi Bishop (Anna Gunn), who has achieved some success in her career. However, Bishop's latest venture failed miserably, and her value as an investment expert had faded considerably.

Both the *Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) and *Wall Street* (1987) features ambitious characters that rise from lowly positions to great wealth. *The Wolf of Wall Street* stars Leonardo DiCaprio as Jordan Belfort, a money-hungry young man fresh out of college and secures a stockbroker position at L.F. Rothchild on Wall Street. Belfort is infatuated with the fast-paced lifestyle, mentored by Mark Hanna (Matthew McConaughey). As a result of a stock-market crash (Black Monday), Jordan and his coworkers lose their job at the brokerage firm.

Jordan Belfort: Unbelievable. My first shitty day as a broker. Within a month, L.F.

Rothschild, an institution since 1899, closed its doors... Wall Street had swallowed me up and shit me right back out again.

Jordan typifies the “down on their luck” character, relegated to living in a small apartment with his wife, Teresa. She offers to pawn her engagement ring to help the financially strapped couple. Similarly, *Wall Street* stars Charlie Sheen as Bud Fox, a young stockbroker that is unsuccessful. He is debt-ridden, cynically exclaiming that “*American Express have a hitman looking for me.*” Despite his best attempts, Bud is constantly losing sales calls and has potential clients hang up the phone on him. He receives cash handouts from his coworkers and even resorts to securing a \$300 loan from his working-class father. The Down-on-their-luck narrative is an important component of many of the films as it allows the audience to become sympathetic and invested in the main protagonist. Because the theme permeates the entire film, the audience continues to feel the same way regardless of the character’s transgressions. .

(2) The Ah-Ha or Life-Altering Moment

As a natural progression in occupational crime films, the sympathetic character introduced early on is often met with a life-altering moment where the characters' attributes and prospects for the future suddenly change. Filmmakers utilize these 'a-ha' moments to provide the turning point where the 'down on their luck' character sees a distinct path to success before them and are willing to do what it takes to achieve it. Usually, these moments are chance encounters, not sought out by the character, which allows the viewer to maintain their sympathetic view – 'if only that had not happened....' In seven of the ten occupational crime films in the sample, there is a critical moment where the main character experiences a life-altering moment or a "by chance" encounter that changes their fortunes, for better or worse. In the film *Boiler Room*, Seth Davis gets a knock at his door, which he describes as an altering moment in his life, "*Strange to think that knock changed everything. Everything.*" His cousin and a friend are driving a brand-new Ferrari at the door, which Seth is instantly captivated by. Together, they recruit Seth to join them at a firm called JT Marlin with promises that he, too, will soon be able to afford his own Ferrari working as a stockbroker. This encounter marks the beginning of Seth's downfall. In *The Wolf of Wall Street*, when Jordan Belfort (Leonardo DiCaprio) is left discouraged and unemployed due to the stock market crash, his wife Teresa (Cristin Milioti) comes across an advertisement in the newspaper for a stockbroker position at a company called 'Investors Center' in Long Island. When Belfort arrives at the company, he quickly realizes that he is dealing with incompetent employees selling invaluable companies on 'pink sheets,' which are penny stocks. The business is only somewhat regulated, but Jordan ignores that and sets his sites on the opportunity to make money.

Jordan Belfort: *Just like that, I made two grand...the other guys looked at me like I'd just discovered fire.*

Jordan proves to be remarkably skilled at convincing innocent people to purchase worthless stocks. He teaches the other employees to do the same and builds his own business taking advantage of unsuspecting investors with promises of making them rich. Upon his wife's discovery of that seemingly innocent advertisement, Jordan Belfort's life is forever changed.

Much like *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *The Hudsucker Proxy* depicts a dejected Norville Barnes (Tim Robbins) walking down the streets of New York City when a newspaper flies into the back of his leg. He picks it up and sees a coffee cup stain circling an advertisement for Hudsucker Industries, which states no experience is necessary. He is hired and works in the mailroom when a man walks into the mailroom carrying a 'blue letter.' He randomly selects Norville to deliver it directly to the new CEO, Sid Mussberger (Paul Newman). Due to the suicide of the original CEO, the company's shares were mandated to be sold to the public. Mussberger devises a plan to insert an incompetent President to run the company, which will cause the share price to plummet, enabling him to take control of the company by buying up the majority of the stock at a low price. After meeting Norville, he decides he is the perfect pawn to use. The life-altering or 'ah-ha' moment is two-fold, as Norville is the one randomly chosen to deliver the envelope, he becomes unwittingly involved in the scheme, and Mussberger's introduction to Norville is his own 'ah-ha' moment when he sees Norville as the piece of the puzzle needed for his plan to come together.

In the film *Wall Street*, the character of Bud Fox (Charlie Sheen) desperately wishes to meet his professional idol, Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas). It creates his own potentially life-

altering moment when he ingratiates himself into a meeting with Gekko by offering a gift of rare cigars. Before entering the office, Bud looks at himself in the mirror and expresses the magnitude of the opportunity before him:

Bud Fox: *"life comes down to a few moments. This is one of them"*.

Gekko is not impressed with Bud until Bud divulges insider information about BlueStar Airlines that his father had shared with him; they had just received a favourable decision on a lawsuit, and the company is going to boom again. Access to insider information entices Gekko, and their relationship grows, changing the course of Bud's life. *Rogue Trader* features a young and inexperienced stock floor manager, Nick Leeson (Ewan McGregor), who creates his life-altering moment when employee Kim Wong (Jennifer Lim) accidentally sells stock worth 20 thousand instead of buying, and Nick is ordered to fire her. The kind, compassionate Nick avoids firing Kim by deciding to create the '88888' error account where he hides the loss and covers it up by telling his boss that the stock had rebounded, buying himself time so he can try to 'win back the loss in the stock market. Due to this life-altering event, Nick ends up down a path of destruction as he continues to lose more of the client's money.

These three examples on-screen uniformly portray how a simple action or chance meeting can change lives and lead a person down a path of destruction. The films in the sample tend to represent that occupational crime is rarely planned, but rather the opportunity to commit occupational crime presents itself, and some take advantage of these opportunities.

(3) Character Transformation/Redemption

Although many of the occupational crime films depict characters as unscrupulous, greedy, and immoral, the films frequently also maintain a theme of character transformation and redemption, almost always on the part of the main protagonist. This allows and encourages the audience to reaffirm their original feelings of goodness in the character and forgive their crimes. Typically, during the transformation of good to evil, the character denies their true self, caught up in the riches and lifestyle that their behaviour has made possible until their wrongdoings begin to unravel, and they must confront their true selves and make amends. The transformation and redemption themes were overwhelming, appearing in eight of the ten films.

In *The Hudsucker Proxy*, Norville Barnes is initially depicted as a simple, dim-witted, unassuming person, easily manipulated by Sid Mussberger (Paul Newman). However, after being installed as the new CEO, Norville developed the hugely successful hula hoop causing Mussberger's plan to backfire. Norville becomes a successful, famous, media darling causing him to transform into an egotistical, selfish, spoiled celebrity. Amy Archer (Jennifer Jason Leigh) describes Norville's sudden change:

Amy Archer: Shut up. And don't think I haven't noticed that You've changed. I used to think you were a swell guy. Well, to be honest, I thought you were an imbecile. But then I figured out you were a swell guy, a little slow maybe but a swell guy. Well, maybe you're not so slow. But you're not so swell either. And it looks like you're an imbecile after all!... what really hurts is watching you outrun your soul, chasing after money and ease and the perspective of those that wouldn't give you the time day! Oh Norville, don't you

remember how you used to feel about the hoop? You told me you were going to bring a smile to the hips of everyone in America, regardless of race, creed or colour!”.

Norville redeems his character by becoming the person he was at the beginning of the film. His character transformation was caused by his sudden success and the fact that he was not very bright.

When Jordan Belfort (Leonardo DiCaprio) in *Wolf of Wall Street* first joins LF Rothschild, he is a naïve and humble kid with a down-to-earth, loving wife living in a small apartment. He is always presented as ‘money hungry’ but has a passive demeanour and a negative opinion of people who have money.

Jerry Fogel: Just so you know, last year I made over 300 thousand dollars, the other guy you’ll be working for, he made over a million

Jordan Belfort: “A million dollars. I can only imagine what a douchebag that guy must be.”

Jordan Belfort’s character transforms after achieving success with his own company, Stratton Oakmont. He becomes a greedy, self-serving egomaniac entrenched in a world of partying, drugs, and riches with no regard for the harm he is causing his victims. Joe Hunt’s character in *Billionaire Boys Club* suffers the same fate of the character transformation narrative. When Dean Karney (Taron Egerton) gives Joe (Ansel Elgort) \$10,000 of Billmore’s money to invest in gold, the investment loses \$5000. As Dean and Joe leave to pitch further investments in their new company to Charlie Bottoms (Thomas Cocquerel) and the Billmore boys (Jeremy Irvine & Ryan Rottman). Joe changes the \$5000 loss to a gain of \$5000, which convinces them that Joe

and Dean know how to make money. At this point, Joe begins to believe his lie, and his transformation begins as he descends into the affluent world and lifestyle that is a success.

Joe Hunt: By reconciling perspective, right and wrong become relative.

As the boys gain more and more success, Joe's father takes notice. Joe has gone from a humble, hard worker striving for success to a pompous, entitled mogul.

Mr. Hunt: where did you get all the fancy clothes?

Joe: At Armani, they're nice, right. The way things are going, you're not going to have to worry about anything ever again, I'm going to set you up

Mr. Hunt: You're going to set me up?

Joe: Yeah, the BBC is really taking off. I'm going to get you out of this shit hole.

Mr. Hunt: I thought that the one good thing that I did in my life was get you a quality education so you could have a better life than me. But had I known you were going to emulate these people that think they're better than us... Joe, from my experience, if you're honest in business, things don't happen this fast.

In a scene towards the end of the movie, Joe's love interest Sydney (Emma Roberts) lashes out at Dean for the change in Joe's character.

Sidney: You wish you could be like joe, but you are nothing like him. You ruined joe, all he ever wanted was to belong, and you made him think he needed a BMW for that. Joe could have been anything in the world, and now he is twisted, and he is lost because you ruined him!"

Joe's character redeems himself at the end of the film because he recognizes his faults and that he has hurt people. He is genuinely remorseful for his actions, however by this point in the film,

Dean has already sold him out to the authorities, leaving Joe to receive the brunt of the punishment while Dean walks. The film *Boiler Room* features a stockbroker firm, JT Marlin, where the brokers are busy running a “pump and dump” scheme to sell fake stocks to people. They pump the price of the shares up and then sell them off at a profit, leaving the unwitting investors with nothing. Seth Davis quickly learns the ropes and enthusiastically convinces innocent people to invest and lose their money, making himself rich in the process.

Seth Davis: “Alright, so I got into it. Do you know how fuckin good it feels to close someone? To sell someone? It’s amazing”.

Two events cause Seth’s redemption. First, he has destroyed Harry Reynard’s (Taylor Nichols) life after coercing him to invest repeatedly and subsequently lose his life savings and then his family. Second, he discovered that JT Marlin intends to close the firm, cut ties, and start elsewhere. Seth decides to try and correct his wrongs by cooperating with the FBI to hold JT Marlin accountable and finagles a way to invest and earn Harry his money back.

In *Wall Street*, as Bud Fox is achieving incredible professional success through his partnership with Gekko, he is also becoming a shell of his former self. He had always been driven and consumed by his work but is now more driven by money and greed and has transformed into a miniature version of Gordon. At one point, Bud even looks at himself in the mirror and asks, “who am I?”

Bud Fox: You think I’m going to be a broker for the rest of my life Darien? I’m going to be a giant.

Bud convinces his father Carl (Martin Sheen) to meet with Gekko to discuss a possible partnership/purchase of BlueStar Airline to rebuild it. Carl listens to Gekko’s plan, which

includes reducing wages and making material changes to the company, and immediately distrusts him. Bud, on the other hand, supports the ideas.

Carl Fox: he's using you, kid. He's got your prick in his back pocket, but you're too blind to see it.

Bud Fox: No. What I see is a jealous old machinist who can't stand the fact that his son has become more successful than he has!

Carl Fox: What you see is a guy who never measured a man's success by the size of his wallet!

Eventually, Bud discovers that Gordon has double-crossed him and plans to put everyone out of work and liquidate the company. Bud's redemption begins when even though Bud stands to make much money with the deal, he realizes that his loyalties lie with his father, and he implements a plan to sink Gekko, save the company and the jobs from earning back his father's respect. *Wall Street 2: Money Never Sleeps (2010)*, Gordon Gekko is released from prison, serving time for insider trading. He is determined to reconnect with his estranged daughter Winnie Gekko (Carey Mulligan), dating Jake Moore (Shia Labeouf). Gordon appears like a man who truly wants to make things right with his family. However, Gordon still has the unrelenting desire to be a success in the financial world. As Jake and Gordon develop a relationship throughout the film, Gekko tells Jake he has put \$100 million into a trust account for Winnie. The only way to get the money to America to invest in Jake's environmental research company 'Fusion' on behalf of Gordon is if Winnie goes to Switzerland, signs it over to Jake. He then will entrust it to Gekko. Once this is done, Gekko abandons them and betrays their trust, taking the money and moving to London to set up an investment company. In the end, Gordon reappears,

transforming and redeeming his character once again, telling them that he has kept his promise and returned the money to them.

In the film *Rogue Trader*, Nick Leeson (Ewan McGregor) begins as a GM who wants to do a good job and succeed. When he makes his first lousy decision to hide an employee's error, things begin to spiral out of control. Trying to earn money back, he ends up losing \$10 million and then spends the rest of the film fearing that he will be discovered, while his bosses believe he is doing a spectacular job and entrust him with even more funds to invest. Nick's transformation comes from a place of addiction. As a result, investing and trading became a gambling source, with compounding losses swelling to over \$800 million. The film *Equity* continues the trend of characters beginning as ambitious, inexperienced, and naïve. Erin Manning (Sarah Megan Thomas) begins as a somewhat meek but ambitious young woman. She is loyal to Naomi Bishop (Anna Gunn) and wants to do an excellent job and earn her respect in the IPO world. However, as the film progresses, Erin goes down a more ruthless path for success as she becomes enthralled and obsessed with her job. In one scene, she is taking calls during her pregnancy ultrasound,

Erin: This is Erin... hello! Hello! I can't get a signal in here

Husband: Hun...

Erin: it's that woman I told you about, her company might invest big in Cachet!

Husband: She might tell you to enjoy your ultrasound...

Erin: Ok

Erin eventually betrays Naomi and engages in Insider Trading by divulging privileged information about Cachet and its hackable system to Michael Connor (James Purefoy), who

capitalizes on it – causing Cachet to lose much of its worth. Erin does this because it is highly insinuated that Michael will recruit and promote her at his company in exchange for the information. Michael does not keep his promise, but Erin winds up taking Naomi's position as Senior Investment banker after Naomi is held responsible and fired for the Cachet disaster. Erin's original character transforms, but she does not redeem herself.

Almost all of the main protagonists in the films viewed in the sample are introduced as good people who get caught up or coerced into illicit activities that do not represent who they really are as people. Most of these characters also find their way back to decent human values when they come to realize the emptiness of their success.

(4) Element of Cover-Up/Uncovering of Sinister Plot

The characters in occupational crime films generally spend a significant amount of energy striving to cover up their illicit activities. If not covering up their deeds, they are uncovering someone else's, which allows the character to become a victim or at least become the 'good guy' they were portrayed to be at the beginning of the film. The cover-up or uncovering of a sinister plot is common in many films; however, occupational films typically use this theme to reveal the characters' struggle and facilitate their redemption. The cover-up or uncovering of a sinister plot theme was present in six of the ten films viewed. The film *Equity* presents the uncovering of a sinister plot narrative as Naomi Bishop (Anna Gunn) realizes that Erin Manning (Sarah Megan Thomas) was the one who leaked the information to Michael (James Purefoy). Naomi realizes Erin betrayed her when Naomi sees Erin is using a green pen that Michael also uses. Throughout *Wall Street*, Bud is guided by Gordon Gekko. However,

eventually, Bud finds out through a lawyer friend that Gordon is about to double-cross him and uses this information to redeem himself. Seth Davis finds himself in a similar plot to Bud Fox in *Boiler Room*. Seth uncovers that the heads of JT Marlin plan to shut down the firm, cut ties with all employees, and start up a new firm in a new location while duplicating the same illegal practices.

Seth Davis: I don't know what made me walk in there. Things were going well for me; I passed the Series 7 and was closing my forty accounts for Greg. I didn't want to go in, but a part of me had to know what Michael was doing there the week before.

Seth discovers documents being shredded, and the search for a new location confirmed that the company was going to leave the present employees to answer for their dishonourable business practices. The film *Billionaire Boys Club* displays a clear example of the element of a cover-up narrative when Joe Hunt (Ansel Elgort) calls Ron Levin's (Kevin Spacey) broker, Frank (Billy Slaughter), about the final investment cheques for the company. Frank explains to Joe that the money was never real. He was duped into giving Joe a fake account by Ron so that Ron could be provided with a statement showing the balance, which he could use to secure a million-dollar loan from someone else illegally.

Frank: Ok, wait, is this a part of the story?

Joe Hunt: What story

Frank: The story, Joe?

Joe Hunt: What story Frank?

Frank: Are you messing with me

Joe: Does it sound like I'm messing with you

Frank: Joe, listen, Ron told me he's a producer for network news doing an expose on your gold system. He got me to issue statements on a phoney account.

Joe Hunt: Phoney?

Frank: Yah, the money was not even real. It was all part of the story; he had a camera crew in my office filming me during our first call

Joe realizes that if the money was never real, his success was never real either, and it was all for nothing. The sinister plot narrative is uncovered by Amy Archer, a reporter for the Manhattan Argus Newspaper in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. After business hours, Amy is snooping around Hudsucker industries. She is trying to figure out how Norville has managed to make it into his position. She finds a hole that peeks into Sid's office. When Moses (Bill Cobbs), the clock operator, notices, he tells her Sid's plan to deplete the stock to instill panic in shareholders.

Amy: So if you know everything about Hudsucker, tell me why the board decided to make Norville Barnes president?

Moses: Well, that did surprise old Moses at first. I didn't think the board was that smart

Amy: That smart?

Moses: But then I figured it out. They did it because they figure young Norville for a nitwit.

Amy: Now why on earth would the board want a nitwit to be president!

Moses: They's trying to inspire panic. Make that stock cheap so they can snatch it up all for themselves.

Amy has now discovered Sid's master plan of stock fraud.

In *Rogue Trader*, the main protagonist is responsible for the sinister cover-up as Nick Leeson creates the 88888 Error Account to cover up his losses as stock floor manager. In this account, his losses go undetected as he tries to “win” back the clientele’s lost money. Understandably in any type of crime film, and certainly in occupational crime films, there must be a sinister deed or character(s) that intend to undermine even the already criminal actions of the hero or main protagonist. Discovering these plots, falling prey to them, or acting to thwart them allows the character to realize their mistakes and provide them with a chance at character redemption.

(5) Cooperating With Law Enforcement

Cooperation and collaboration with law enforcement can be an integral part of a film character’s redemption process and a standard narrative in all crime films. More often than not, the protagonist is surrounded and entangled with characters more sordid than they are. Working with law enforcement, they help to ensure the ‘real’ criminals get what they deserve, and the audience gets the happy ending they want. It is important to note that the protagonist tends only to reach this point after their illicit acts have been discovered. In seven of the ten occupational crime films, characters work with law enforcement in effort to ‘save their own skin’ or exact revenge on their fellow perpetrators. *The Wizard of Lies (2017)* delivers this narrative when Bernie Madoff (Robert DeNiro) is arrested by law enforcement. Bernie has a nonchalant and modest demeanour as he describes and confesses to his Ponzi scheme, resigning himself to his fate. Like Bernie Madoff, Jordan Belfort in *The Wolf of Wall Street*

eventually cooperates with law enforcement when he realizes his penny stock fraud is over. He even agrees to wear a wire to help incriminate his friends.

FBI Agent: Full cooperation. He provides us with a comprehensive list of all the co-conspirators over the last seven years, and he wears a wire.

Jordan: Wait, did you just say wear a wire?

FBI Agent: A wire.

Jordan: What does that mean? You want me to rat, is that it?

FBI Agent: No, I want you to cooperate

Dean Karney (Taron Egerton) also follows a path similar to Belfort at the conclusion of *Billionaire Boys Club*. Dean gives up his best friend Joe Hunt (Ansel Elgort) to the police to ensure that Joe is the one who is punished for the murders that took place and not him. Dean receives a plea deal for his cooperation, and Joe winds up in prison. In *Boiler Room*, the police monitor Seth Davis before they eventually arrest him. Seth decides to cooperate with the FBI and transfers JT Marlin's information onto a floppy disc as evidence for the FBI's obtaining a warrant and subsequent raid on their offices. To redeem himself, *Wall Street's* main protagonist Bud Fox devises a plan with Sir Larry Wildman (Terence Stamp) to increase BlueStar stock and then drive the stock price down so that Wildman can purchase the company. At the same time, Gordon Gekko sells his majority stockholding, thus leaving Gekko empty-handed. The plan works; however, Bud is arrested for insider trading. He decides to cooperate with law enforcement by wearing a wire during his planned confrontation with Gekko knowing that Gekko will incriminate himself and be sent to prison. Thwarting the attempt of their nemesis to

commit further crimes and exploit more people is an excellent way to let the protagonist 'off the hook' for their crimes and provide a happy ending to a storyline.

(6) Glamourization of Greed/Insatiable Success

The public's fascination with power, greed and money contributes to the success of movies that depict individuals entrenched in criminal, or at best immoral behaviour in pursuing the glamorous lifestyles of the rich, and audiences everywhere applaud their actions. Themes of excessive greed, extravagant behaviour, and lavish lifestyle are extremely popular in occupational crime films. Audiences can see 'how the other half live' and just how far someone is willing to go to achieve it. Focus is placed on the protagonist, and the audience is invested in a happy outcome for them. Focus is rarely on the victims of the crime. In seven of the ten occupational crime films viewed, the theme of glamour and greed is prevalent.

All of the players in the film *Equity* are very competitive in their pursuit of individual success and wealth. Samantha Ryan (Sarah Megan Thomas) is a friend of Naomi (Anna Gunn) who is using her to get to her boyfriend, Michael Connor (James Purefoy), whom she suspects of insider trading. On-screen, Michael is frequently seen trying to get insider information about Naomi's new project 'Cachet,' a website embedded in privacy and security. Naomi, however, does not let him in on any insider information. In addition, Naomi's assistant Erin is desperate for a promotion in her field that will earn her more money and respect from her peers. She decides to divulge insider information to Michael about how Marin (Sophie Von Haselberg), a coder at Cachet, was fired because she had expressed concerns about the site's potential to be hacked, with an expectation that Michael will fast-track her career out of reciprocity for the

information. The film *Wall Street* wholly embodies the theme of greed and the pursuit of wealth in keeping with its iconic tag line “Greed is Good,” an expression used by Michael Douglas’s equally iconic character, Gordon Gekko. Gordon is the living image of success and wealth -- a beautiful home, fine restaurants, and designer suites. His insatiable greed for money and power makes an impression on underling Bud Fox. Under Gordon’s leadership, he learns to emulate Gordon in his business and personal life in attaining his wealthy indulgences - luxurious office, beautiful home, and designer suits. Both characters are all-consumed with greed and conquering the financial world at the expense of having any morals and ethics. *Boiler Room*’s Seth Davis characterizes the narrative of greed as well as what motivates him,

Seth Davis: *“Initially, I got in for the cash... but earning my dad’s respect, that’s what kept me there”.*

The firm provided Seth with money and an esteemed perception of himself and his father, which meant the world to Seth. *Boiler Room* also portrays the heads of JT Marlin as ‘filthy rich and self-proclaimed ‘winners,’ which inspires their employees to be like them. Jim Young (Ben Affleck) is the head broker and a mega-successful JT Marlin member. He is an intense and ruthless broker who draws a fine line between success and failure. He motivates and manipulates his employees into fully immersing themselves in JT Marlin.

Jim Young: *“You want details? Fine. I drive a Ferrari, 355 Cabriolet. What’s up? I have a ridiculous house in the South Fork. I have every toy you could possibly imagine”.*

Jim shows off his materialistic greed to the young and hungry employees to maintain their excitement and dedication to their work without knowing that his wealth was not legitimately earned. In the film *Owning Mahowny (2003)*, Dan Mahowny (Philip Seymour Hoffman)

struggles with addiction. However, that does not absolve him from being greedy and dishonest. On-screen, Dan lies and cons his way through his personal and professional life to maintain his relationship with Belinda (Minnie Driver) as well as his coworkers. He must remain trusted at his job, which provides him with the financial resources to embezzle the funds needed for his high-stakes casino gambling. No matter how much money Dan embezzles or wins, his insatiable compulsion is never satisfied. Jordan Belfort in *The Wolf of Wall Street* provides commentary throughout much of the film through the main character Jordan Belfort who epitomizes greed, and the greed narrative demonstrated in films,

Jordan Belfort: I'm a former member of the middle class raised by two accountants in a tiny apartment in Bayside, Queens. The year I turned 26, I made 49 million dollars as the head of my own brokerage firm-- --which really pissed me off because it was three shy of a million a week. In addition to Naomi and my two perfect kids, I own a mansion, private jet, six cars, three horses, two vacation homes and a 170-foot yacht. I also gamble like a degenerate. I drink like a fish, fuck hookers maybe five times a week. I have three different Federal agencies looking to indict me. Oh, and I love drugs!"

Jordan breaks the law and takes advantage of people. However, the events shown on screen typically glorify these actions, as Jordan and the rest of his cohorts live freely and lavishly.

This aspect of occupational crime films can be criticized because they do not focus on the victims, even factual and true films. Audiences are almost oblivious to the harm that has been done to people. Instead, they relish in the characters' celebratory, excessive and outrageous lifestyles, which is the attraction of these films.

Chapter 4: Corporate Crime Narratives

Corporate crime films offer another unique narrative for movie-goers, as they tend to confirm the public's suspicions about the corporate world. People believe that corporations will stop at nothing to increase profits and keep their actions from being discovered, and corporate crime films prove to the audience that this is true. These films also provide the main protagonist character usually portrayed as the 'little guy' that viewers enjoy rooting. Their adversary is a big, bad behemoth called a corporation that uses all of its power and resources to defeat them. Undoubtedly, it is gratifying when the underdog manages to bring them down and especially exasperating when we realize there is no real punishment for the guilty party. Common corporate crimes in the sample include financial fraud, environmental crimes, the cover-up of defective or dangerous products and negligent safety protocols causing illness or loss of life. As an example, as the study progressed, it was apparent that the majority of the films had a theme of a 'denial of responsibility' on the giant corporation's side of things where the corporation felt that they had committed no wrongdoing and were not at fault for the injustice brought to their attention.

The concept of corporate denial of responsibility is interpreted by (Whyte, Friedrichs, & Ceccato, 2016) as the ability of the corporation to use 'techniques of neutralization' that serve to excuse their nefarious actions. Because of the extensive resources available to them, "corporations are able to employ public relations advocates, develop press and publicity strategies...which enables them to present a very wide range of 'truths' about their activities which allow them to render particular events or processes relatively invisible" (Whyte, et al,

2016). Individual perpetrators working on behalf of corporations also attempt to neutralize their criminality by suggesting that their acts were for the good of the company, their employees and general success in the marketplace (Stadler & Benson, 2012). Maintaining a positive self image is important to corporations, and they do this by maintaining their innocence regardless of their being evidence of their wrong-doing (Whyte, et al, 2016).

Results

This research study uncovered themes or narratives that were common in many if not all of the thirteen corporate crime films, and include (1) The Element of Cover-up and Corporate Intimidation (2) Life Altering Moment or Chance Encounter (3) David vs. Goliath (4) Determined Advocate (5) True or Based on True Story (6) Lack of Repercussion for Individual Perpetrators or the Corporation.

Table 3

Correlation Between Corporate Crime Films and Themes

| FILM | Element of Cover Up/Corporate Intimidation | Life Altering Moment/Chance Encounter | David VS Goliath | Determined Advocate | True Story or Based on True Events | Lack of Repercussions on Individual Perpetrators |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Dark Waters (2019) | X | | X | X | X | X |
| Erin Brockovich (2000) | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| The Informant! (2009) | X | | | | X | X |
| Class Action (1991) | X | | X | X | X | |
| Silkwood (1983) | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| The China Syndrome (1979) | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| The Insider (1999) | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Deepwater Horizon (2016) | X | | X | X | X | X |
| A Civil Action (1998) | X | X | X | X | X | |
| The Crooked E: The Unshredded Truth About Enron (2003) | X | X | | | X | X |
| The Big Short (2015) | X | | | | X | X |
| Gold (2016) | X | X | | | X | |
| Too Big to Fail (2011) | X | | | | X | X |

(1) Element of Cover-Up and Intimidation

A common theme in corporate crime films is the element of cover-up and intimidation. Films often follow a narrative where the corporation's actions are questioned when suspected of a crime or potential crime. The corporation immediately goes into denial, cover-up and intimidation mode. The public sentiment on large corporations is that they are powerful, are connected to powerful people, and have the resources to make any accusations of wrongdoing go away. Portraying large powerful corporations in the way the public views them appeals to the audience's emotions. In the corporate crime films viewed, an overwhelming thirteen of the thirteen films represent corporations as desperate to cover their misdeeds.

The China Syndrome (1979) depicts this narrative through numerous examples of characters who expose the sinister and secret actions at the Ventana Nuclear Plant. The characters continue to find evidence of the potential nuclear tragedy that can take place if they are not stopped. Richard Adams (Michael Douglas) steals footage taken at the plant during the first plant malfunction, which he presents to nuclear experts.

Greg Minor: If the core is exposed for whatever reason, the fuel heats beyond core heat tolerance in a matter of minutes. Nothing can stop it. It melts right down through the bottom of the plant, theoretically to China. But of course, as soon as it hits groundwater, it blasts into the atmosphere and sends out clouds of radioactivity. The number of people killed would depend on which way the wind is blowing, render an area the size of Pennsylvania permanently uninhabitable, not to mention the cancer that would show up later.

Karen Silkwood (Meryl Streep) in the film *Silkwood* (1983) is transferred out of the dry processing line to a position making photographic records of fuel rods for reactors. Karen uncovers that the supervisor, Winston (Craig T. Nelson), doctors her photos and covers up the imperfections of the fuel rods. He tells Karen the fuel rods are acceptable, which Karen does not believe. Karen realizes that the company 'cuts corners,' thereby risking the health and safety of Kerr McGee's employees. The film *Dark Waters* (2019) finds new lawyer Rob Bilott (Mark Ruffalo) in the depths of a case against DuPont. Bilott discovers a chemical called PFOA that is unknown and undocumented in files and subsequently learns that PFOA is in the town's water supply, evidenced by a young girl's black teeth. Through his investigation, Rob finds out that DuPont has destroyed any old files related to chemical issues. DuPont had conducted their chemical testing on rats and found that they developed cancer. They had also prohibited women from working on the Teflon line producing pans that contained PFOA but did not explain why they did this. Companies were allowing PFOA to manufacture non-stick Teflon pans even though it was unsafe for no other reason than it was very profitable. The film *The Crooked E: The Unshredded Truth About Enron* (2003) follows suit when Brian Cruver (Christian Kane) decides to investigate why a deal is being delayed and goes upstairs to see Andrew Tillman (Paul Christie), who is managing the account. Brian sees that all of his numbers have been manipulated and inflated. Tillman explains that bonuses and stock options are based on projections, encouraging Enron to falsify its numbers.

Andrew: Well, I thought the evaluations were a little inflated. Don't take it personally, though, I mean. Everybody does it

Brian: *No, I don't understand what you mean. I did these numbers myself. I ran the numbers... I did, I did, these aren't my numbers. I mean, the planets would have to be aligned perfectly to get these results*

Andrew: *Yeah, well, apparently your boss is anticipating a total galactic shift that's his signature right there.*

Brian: *why would Welling change my numbers?*

Andrew: *you're kidding. Cruver how to get rich here? and I don't I don't mean a little bit rich I mean Lou Pie rich*

Brian: *bonuses and stock options*

Andrew: *bingo, and what are they basing it on?*

Brian: *Enron's profits*

Andrew: *Wrong. Actually, they're based on Enron's future profits, which are booked the instant the deal is closed, meaning on a ten-year deal, the executive's immediate bonus is based on ten years' worth of estimated future profits, and you know who actually makes those estimates?*

Brian: *the same exec getting the bonuses and stock options*

Andrew: *Now, let's say that well the estimate turns out to be, I don't know, how should we say inflated, is Enron actually going to go back to the exec and get the stock options and bonuses back? No way.*

Brian: *there'd be no reason to avoid a risky deal. I don't understand how upper management would allow ...*

Andrew: It's because Enron actually used the same estimates in their earning reports, which magically transform themselves into revenue which translates directly into higher stock prices for investors

Brian: and higher bonuses and stock option payouts for execs

Andrew: everybody wins.

Similarly, in the film *Gold (2016)*, we realize that the narrative of deception and manipulation is front and center. Towards the end of the film, Kenny Wells (Matthew McConaughey) discovers the gold mine that Michael Acosta (Edgar Ramirez) claims he discovered. At the same time, Kenny was unconscious battling malaria, which was fraudulent. He not only managed to convince Kenny of this but also large banks such as JP Morgan, who invested in Kenny's 'Washoe Mining Company.' What Acosta had found was 'river gold,' which is rounded and smooth, whereas real gold is flaky, rough and edged; Acosta had sprinkled gold dust onto these smooth rocks to make them look legitimate.

Gold Expert: It's called salting. It literally means when someone sprinkles gold dust into a rock sample like you salt your steak. It is the oldest trick in the book.

The true value of the "gold" is nothing. Essentially Acosta stole from banks. However, this also obviously resulted in many angry stockholders and investors who lost vast sums of money due to Washoe Mining Company's fraudulent claims. Jan Schlichtmann (John Travolta) in *A Civil Action (1998)* investigates the contamination of water supplies by two companies, Beatrice Foods and W.R. Grace, where the workers are extremely loyal to their company and one another. For this reason, they deny any culpability and are largely uncooperative with Jan Schlichtmann's legal team. Erin Brockovich (Julia Roberts) in the self-titled film *Erin Brockovich*

also investigates a contaminated water supply by PG & E this time. They go to great lengths throughout the film to cover up that they are responsible for the contamination. Some of the methods they use in the cover-up include trying to buy the residents' homes to move out of the area and holding presentations about how chromium is healthy for them, so there is no need to worry about the contamination levels and so on. By delaying action by the community, their strategy is to wait for the statute of limitations to end. The film *Class Action (1991)* features lawyer Maggie Ward (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio). He is working for Argo Motors and defending them in a class-action lawsuit headed by her father, Jedediah Ward (Gene Hackman). Maggie finds documentation that reports circuit issues on the Meridian (vehicle model in question) and decides to connect with Alexander Pavol (Jan Rubes), who conducted the circuit tests on the car.

Alexander Pavol: Did you know that what's his name designed the circuit, and I was supposed to test it? But he said, "Alexander Pavol, leave it alone."

We've already tooled up for it on the assembly line. The circuit is OK." That's what he said. But I am a scientist. I test it anyway on my own. I like to mix things. I like to see how things combine. The circuit was OK... until I started hitting the car when the left-turn signal was flashing. Then... Depth charge.

Maggie Ward: - It blew up?

Alexander Pavol: - It blew up.

Maggie Ward: The Meridian blew up?

Alexander Pavol: Yeah. You see, where there's an impact of metal on metal. In this area, the devices are maybe 50-75cm apart. Now, If there's an arc in the flow of the circuit...

Maggie Ward: Yeah.

Alexander Pavol: Just as it's penetrating the electrical fuel pump, then the gas tank will blow up. It's just a simple chain reaction.

Maggie Ward: So you're saying that if the car is hit from the rear when the left-turn signal is functioning, it just might blow up.

Alexander Pavol: Correct.

Pavol tells Maggie he was told to back off the circuit testing. However, he found the malfunction, and its results were catastrophic. Likewise, in the film *The Insider (1999)*, tobacco scientist Jeffrey Wigand (Russell Crowe), as an expert in his field, sits down with Mike Wallace (Christopher Plummer) for a 60 Minutes interview and divulges all of the unethical and illegal practices that Brown & Williamson partakes. When Wigand had discovered, they were using chemically enhanced nicotine. He was fired from the company and hit with a confidentiality order.

Wigand: Part of the reason I'm here is that I felt...

That their representation clearly misstated...

at least within Brown & Williamson's representation,

clearly misstated what is common language within the company.

We are in the nicotine delivery business.

Wallace: *And that's what cigarettes are for.*

Wigand: *Deliver device for nicotine.*

Wallace: *A delivery device for nicotine. Put it in your mouth, light it up, and you're going to get your fix.*

Wigand: *You're gonna get your fix.*

Wallace: *You're saying that Brown & Williamson...manipulates and adjusts the nicotine fix...not by artificially adding nicotine, but by enhancing the effect of nicotine... through the use of chemical elements such as ammonia?*

Wigand: *The process is known as impact boosting. While not spiking nicotine, they clearly manipulate it. There is extensive use of this technology, known as ammonia chemistry. It allows for the nicotine to be more rapidly absorbed in the lung... and therefore affect the brain and central nervous system. The straw that broke the camel's back for me and really put me in trouble with Sandefur was a compound called coumarin. When I came on board at B&W, they had tried to transition from coumarin to a similar flavour... that would give the same taste and had been unsuccessful. I wanted it out immediately. I was told that it would affect sales, so I should mind my own business. I constructed a memo to Mr. Sandefur indicating that I could not, in conscience... continue with coumarin in a product that we now knew we had documentation was similar to coumadin, a lung-specific carcinogen.*

Wallace: *And you sent the document forward to Sandefur?*

Wigand: *I sent the document forward to Sandefur. I was told that we would continue to work on a substitute. We weren't going to remove it as it would impact sales, and that*

that was his decision.

Wallace: *In other words, you are charging Sandefur and Brown & Williamson*

With ignoring health considerations consciously?

Wigand: *Most certainly.*

The Informant! (2009) follows the corporate cover-up narrative through the main character Mark Whitacre (Matt Damon) as he approaches the FBI to expose Mick Andreas (Tom Papa) and Archer Daniels Midland in their price-fixing scheme. We find out towards the end of the film that he is guilty of accepting 'kickbacks' and participating in embezzlement. Mark used the FBI and performed as a cooperating witness while embezzling 9 million dollars from ADM.

Cover-up and intimidation correspond with denial of responsibility that is seen so often when corporations' nefarious actions are exposed, in film, and in real life. This theme helps to support the 'little guy' image of the main protagonist and according to Ribstein (2012), may be helping to feed the anti-business sentiment in the United States.

(2) Life Altering Moment/Chance Encounter

Not surprisingly, people do not tend to risk their jobs, their families, and even their lives to go out looking to dig up evidence in order to find a crime for no reason. However, they are at times presented with a situation or information that they cannot turn away from, whether they want to or not, which can lead to the discovery of a corporate crime or negligence. The knowledge or strong suspicion that a giant conglomerate can be poisoning people, killing

people, or stealing from people is a heavy burden to bear. The decision to take on that burden is difficult. In many cases, they have no idea what the consequences will be. There are others, though, whose profession allows them and trains them for these types of investigations, such as lawyers and journalists who may have easier access and more support than a private citizen does. Of the thirteen films in the sample, there are seven examples of people being in 'the right place at the right time,' which raises their suspicion and leads them down a path to the truth. *Erin Brockovich (2000)* introduces this narrative as Erin Brockovich seeks out litigation support for the injuries she suffered in a car accident. She meets lawyer Ed Masry (Albert Finney). Ed takes on Erin's case, but they lose. As Erin's story continues, she cannot find a job and eventually demands Ed Masry hire her at his firm sorting files as he had promised her 'things would work out, so he reluctantly agrees. While working at the firm, Erin comes across real estate files combined with medical and blood sample files, which puzzles her. The files include information about how PG & E are offering to purchase Donna Jensen's (Marg Helgenberger) home, a resident of Hinkley, California. It is the chance discovery of these files that Erin's life changes and goes down the path of investigating PG & E and their pollution of carcinogenic hexavalent chromium in Hinkley's water supply. Kenny Wells is broken down and beaten financially in *Gold* when he has a dream that there are large amounts of gold in Indonesia and is completely convinced that this is a 'calling' from beyond. The dream motivates him to meet with a geologist named Michael Acosta, and Kenny trusts that this is the man who knows where to dig due to his past success. They eventually partner up in their quest to strike gold in Indonesia, and this undertaking inevitably changes his life. *The Insider* presents the life-altering narrative when Lowell Bergman (Al Pacino) anonymously receives a package of documents that

he cannot understand due to the scientific terminology. Lowell, through his connections, is directed to Jeffrey Wigand, and the two become partners in exposing Big Tobacco's immoral deception of the public. Receiving the anonymously sent package of documents changes Lowell's life. In *Dark Waters*, lawyer Rob Bilott who ordinarily defends large corporations, is approached by two farmers referred to him by Bilott's Grandmother about pollution in their water supply caused by DuPont. The farmers believe the water is causing cancer in their farm animals. Rob is not interested in or has the time for the case and desperately wants to pawn it off to another lawyer. However, Rob visits the farm and is attacked by a crazed and dangerous cow that the farmer is forced to kill, which changes Bilott's mind. He presents the case to his boss, who reluctantly agrees to let Bilott pursue it further. *The Crooked E: The Unshredded Truth About Enron* introduces Brian Cruver's life-altering moment when he lands his dream job at Enron Corporation. In *A Civil Action*, Jan Schlichtmann is a successful Lawyer in Boston. While on a radio show, a woman calls in and explains that her son passed away from leukemia and that Jan's firm is handling the case. Jan investigates the case and discovers that there are claims of carcinogens in the town of Woburn's water supply and feels a sense of responsibility to check it out but with plans to ultimately decline the case. On the way out of Woburn, Jan is stopped for speeding. While he is stopped, he looks out across the river and sees companies that quite likely could be contaminating the water with chemicals, which motivates him to investigate further.

Jan Schlichtmann: *It was fate. I was meant to get that ticket, at that moment, at that exact spot in the road.*

When Jan sees that a large corporation like Beatrice Foods could be responsible, he decides to take on the case due to the potentially significant financial settlement. The narrative of the chance encounter is central in the film *The China Syndrome*. While on a tour of the Ventana nuclear plant, Kimberly Wells (Jane Fonda) and her crew are by coincidence witnesses to a SCRAM, an emergency due to a malfunction in the plant. They get this on tape, which then sends them down a road of activism and justice.

Most corporate crime films begin with a chance to discover their wrong-doings or a chance encounter that prompts an individual to get involved. Anyone taking on a giant corporation knows that the task will be daunting, so it is not surprising that many of their crimes go unchallenged.

(3) David vs. Goliath

The David vs Goliath theme is in reference to the 'little guy' standing up to the 'rich and powerful'. This theme is very popular in corporate crime films, and audiences enjoy rooting for the 'little guy' who must fight the uphill battle with nothing but their courage, determination, and hard work. In general, people's lives are shaped by governments and big corporations, and people also have a high degree of mistrust towards those entities. Filmmakers know this and use this theme of fighting back and winning against corrupt government officials and corrupt corporations. The David vs Goliath theme is very apparent in eight of the thirteen films viewed. The film *The China Syndrome* is a story of four reporters, Kimberly (Jane Fonda), Richard (Michael Douglas), Jack (Jack Lemmon), and Hector (Daniel Valdez), who join forces to expose safety negligence by the Ventana Nuclear Plant; however, Ventana is powerful and engages in

intimidation tactics against the four to dissuade them from pursuing their investigation further. Ventana has the financial resources to defend itself and manipulate the media on how its story is presented. *Dark Waters* features Taft Law, a small law firm that does not have the resources to take on a DuPont corporate giant with seemingly unlimited funds. This is a frequent topic in the film as Tom Terp (Tim Robbins), the owner, tells Rob that the money required to try a case of this magnitude is out of their financial realm. Rob even puts his own money up by taking funds from his children's education fund and household, the stress of which ultimately results in him having a stroke. In *Deep Water Horizon (2016)*, the David vs Goliath narrative is largely duked out between the workers of the rig and the representatives on board for Transocean and BP Oil Company. The representatives have authority over the workers and dictate the company's plans, which puts everyone on board in grave danger. The film *A Civil Action* depicts Jan Schlichtmann's firm as a small one dealing with significant money issues while trying against Grace and Beatrice Foods. These significant cases are costly, and it is difficult for a small firm with a small clientele to keep up with the costs. Often large corporations use a strategy of spending their adversaries out of business. Jan convinces the firm to borrow money from the bank as he believes they will make money back when they win the case. *Erin Brockovich* typifies this narrative as Ed Masry's firm is very small and consistently deals with serious money issues while trying against PG & E.

Mr. Foil: *A million things could cause those problems. Poor diet, bad genes, irresponsible lifestyle. Our offer is more than fair.*

Ed Masry: *Wait a minute, I thought we were negotiating here?*

Mr. Foil: *\$250,000 is all I'm authorized to offer.*

Ed Masry: *I'll present your offer to my clients; I doubt they'll accept.*

Mr. Foil: *Mr. Masry, before you go off on a crusade, remember who you're dealing with.*

PG and E's a 28-billion-dollar corporation.

Class Action follows suit as Jedediah Ward's firm is predicated on battling large corporations who believe they can get away with causing harm to victims because they are so large and invincible. Although this is the type of law he chooses to practice, Jedediah knows he is always the underdog because these corporations have almost unlimited financial resources and endless manpower. *The Insider* portrays Jeffrey Wigand as a lone tobacco scientist who decides to come forward and 'whistle blow' on Brown & Williamson and the Tobacco Industry as a whole because of their use of synthetic enhancements to nicotine, making cigarettes more addictive. Wigand teams with the producer of '60 Minutes' Lowell Bergman, and together they take on the massive and thought to be unbeatable tobacco industry. Wigand and Bergman endure threats that impact their personal lives, careers, and family life due to Big Tobacco's power over the media.

The David vs Goliath theme is a common narrative in many films, especially in corporate crime films. Mega corporations are more than challenging to take on, no matter what their illicit activities are. The struggle between the mighty corporation and the weak individual can be viewed as a metaphor for the many struggles that exist between the classes and specifically as it pertains to this study, the inequalities of the justice system.

(4) Determined Advocate

Filmmakers often choose to establish a hero figure, the main protagonist, who almost single handedly exposes the wrongful deeds of a giant corporation or government agency. This theme is related to the David vs Goliath theme in that it can take just one person who is driven and determined to gather the evidence and unveil the truth in defence of themselves and others. The hero can often be a private citizen, a victim themselves, or a case-obsessed lawyer, and the audience witnesses the harrowing havoc that this fight brings to their life. Regardless, this common thread in corporate crime films provides the viewers with a hero to celebrate and a villain to condemn. The theme of a lone advocate was found in eight of the thirteen corporate crime films viewed. *The Insider* features Lowell Bergman, the producer of Mike Wallace's popular program '60 Minutes.' Bergman becomes the central advocate in helping Jeffrey Wigand publicize his findings on Big Tobacco's immoral and illegal practices. He is responsible for keeping the story alive when so many tried to shut it down. *Class Action* illustrates Jedediah Ward as a lawyer who prides himself on taking down large corporations. He advocates for 'the little man' whom he feels are consistently taken advantage of in the legal system at the hands of corporate criminals. Ward is determined to make those responsible pay, and his firm is dedicated to that end. Erin Brockovich and Ed Masry in *Erin Brockovich* are unwavering on their mission to expose PG&E throughout the film. Erin Brockovich's storyline involves her young family, whom she constantly has to put aside due to the long hours working on the case. The film chronicles Erin's life. She is seen meeting with victims, recruiting victims, learning everything she can about polluted water and its potential damages on humans, and competing with professionals in this matter who try to dissuade her. She rises to the occasion each time.

Erin: *How was school?*

Son: *Fine.*

Erin: *Did you do your homework?*

Son: *Yeah.*

Erin: *Any problems? I know you're upset, but the way this job is... things come up at the last minute. Things I gotta deal with.*

Son: *Fine!*

Erin: *Please don't be mad at me. I'm doing this for us. I know its hard for you to understand, but don't you want mommy to be good at her job? I don't miss dinner all the time. We all ate together last night.*

Son: *You were reading the whole time.*

The film *A Civil Action* presents Jan Schlichtmann as a small firm's flamboyant and mega-successful star lawyer. He is a 'big fish in a small pond.' Eventually, Jan's stubbornness gets the best of him, resulting in a big loss for his firm and the victim's families. This leads to him being fired, losing his lavish lifestyle, and taking the bus to work at a small personal injury law office of his own. Jan makes many mistakes during the film, all caused by his ego, his relentlessness and tenacity. However, these same qualities are responsible for his ultimate success in this case. He is driven to uncover the proof of the contamination and finds it when reviewing old files. He has learned his lesson and turned the case over to the Environmental Protection Agency because they are better equipped to bring the families justice. *Dark Waters* typifies Rob Bilott as a paranoid version of himself as he becomes consumed by the case. He becomes so obsessed that he has an ischemic stroke due to the stress. Rob neglects his wife and children,

and his wife has to remind him that his own family needs him. His mother-in-law has cancer, and her brother is in rehab. *The China Syndrome* depicts the central advocate as Richard Adams, who is Kimberly Wells' cameraman. Though all the protagonists are determined to expose Ventana's plant problems, Richard is the most vocal, animated and resolved to do what he feels is right. He goes as far as to steal Ventana's emergency shutdown footage and shows it to experts to get more information. *Silkwood* epitomizes this narrative through the actions of Karen Silkwood. Karen is an employee at Kerr & McGee nuclear plant and takes on the role of president of her employee union as she unveils the many health and wellness risks of working at the plant. Throughout the film, Karen goes to great lengths to expose the 'cutting of corners' and massive safety concerns happening at the nuclear plant, so much so that it ultimately costs her life. An important element in corporate crime films is the hero aspect, and even more so, a hero that makes an extreme sacrifice for their cause.

(5) True Story or Based On

One of the elements that make corporate crime films so popular with audiences is that they are often tales of true events or based on true stories. Film media is an excellent source for the public to learn about types of corporate malfeasance and to see first-hand the profound effects it can have on all parties involved. Films most often focus on financial and environmental corporate crimes and government corruption in global and domestic affairs. Generally, the public perceives these entities as powerful and dishonest. Consequently, they feel satisfied that their suspicions are confirmed when they see the story unfold in a dramatic and relatable manner. Each of the thirteen corporate crime films selected in the sample was

true or based on a true story, demonstrating that filmmakers do not need to look very far or hard to find a story about a large corporation responsible for unsafe workplaces, illnesses, or deaths. Although the films *The China Syndrome* and *Class Action* may not be 'true' stories in terms of storyline and character depictions, their respective plots portrayed on screen are certainly inspired by and based on authentic events that have historically taken place at nuclear power plants automotive industries. For example, *Class Action* is based on Ford's car called the Pinto that resulted in deaths due to the vehicle exploding. *The Informant!* depicts actual events that took place in the late 1990s. Archer Daniels Midland did institute a price-fixing scheme, and Mark Whitacre's character did indeed embezzle funds.

Similarly, *Silkwood* features a real-life plant called Kerr & McGee. Margaret Silkwood is the lead union activist striving to establish safer work protocols in the 1970s. *The Crooked E: The Unshredded Truth About Enron* entails the true story of the rise and fall of Enron's once stock market darling, along with its key players. *Too Big to Fail (2011)* and *The Big Short (2015)* combine to depict the very true events of the 2008 global financial crisis, including those who capitalized or failed due to the crisis. The film *Deep Water Horizon* continues this narrative as the film depicts the true events on the drilling rig set up in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, exposing the catastrophic mistakes made that resulted in loss of life and extreme environmental damage and pollution. *Dark Waters* presents the long and exhausting civil case against DuPont due to their contamination of Parkersburg, West Virginia's water supply which resulted in numerous ailments, most notably cancer. *A Civil Action* presents events based on water contamination in Woburn, Massachusetts, at the hands of W.R. Grace and Beatrice Foods. *Erin Brockovich* portrays true events which involve the case against PG&E and their contamination of Hinkley,

California's water supply, which resulted in severe health issues within the community.

Similarly, *The Insider* typifies the narrative of an authentic and accurate storyline and characters regarding a health-related concern against Big Tobacco, specifically Brown & Williamson; the tobacco corporation synthetically enhanced the addictiveness of nicotine in their cigarettes. Finally, the film *Gold* is based on true events inspired by a company called Bre-X and their fraudulent practices. One factor that makes corporate crime films so popular is that so many are factual or based on true stories. In many cases, films are the only way the public learns about the illegal practices of large corporations because of the limited media coverage they receive.

(6) Lack of Repercussion on Individual Perpetrators

A common concern or grievance people have is that big business escapes punishment for many crimes and violations. Although the economic costs of white-collar crime are far greater than that of street crime, the punishments for each are in no way equal. Almost every corporation that has committed a crime negotiates a DPA (Deferred Prosecution Agreement) where the company agrees to pay a fine that allows them to avoid prosecution. It is important to note that the fines agreed to are insignificant compared to these companies' value and massive profits. The expense of the fine ends up being paid by the shareholders, not the actual corporation or its executives/decision-makers. Ten of the thirteen films viewed ended with the company paying a fine or receiving no punishment at all. *Too Big to Fail* and *The Big Short* both depict this narrative by concluding that the entire crisis occurred because Wall Street (big banks) got greedy; The banks were lending money out to people who had no business

qualifying for mortgages and buying houses, and when it all came crashing down, no one was punished for their actions. They caused the overextension on mortgages which almost caused a complete global financial collapse, and not one of the CEOs of any bank went to jail. They paid themselves exorbitant bonuses when they received bailout money paid by the taxpayer.

The Insider outcome was that Big Tobacco was faced with a financial penalty. At the end of the film, Big Tobacco settled for 246 billion dollars among 50 states. There was no penalty in terms of jail time for any individual, even though we know that a corporation cannot make decisions, only people are, and yet they are not held responsible. *Erin Brockovich* concludes with 'Pacific Gas & Electric' reaching a financial settlement with the plaintiffs of Hinkley. It is said to be a large sum, although it is confidential. Again, no one person serves jail time or is held responsible for criminal damages caused by the chemical Hexavalent Chromium. *A Civil Action* concludes with chemical company W.R. Grace being indicted by the EPA for covering up evidence of their use of toxic chemicals and closing the Woburn plant. W.R. Grace and Beatrice Foods split the 694-million-dollar cost of clean-up of the area.

Furthermore, no individual was held criminally responsible for the deaths of the children in Woburn caused by the corporation's malpractice. The events at Deepwater Horizon in *Deepwater Horizon* caused 11 deaths and significant environmental pollution as the blowout lasted for 87 days and resulted in 210 million gallons of oil being spilt into the Gulf of Mexico. BP Company men Robert Kaluza (Brad Leland) and Donald Vidrine (John Malkovich) were indicted for manslaughter; however, the charges were dismissed. Once again, the only penalty was a financial one that BP Oil paid. In the film *The Crooked E: The Unshredded Truth About Enron*, the heads of Enron were investigated, and federal charges were pending, however

ultimately, none of the main culprits were held accountable for their actions. The company manipulated the market and their accounting which ultimately destroyed the energy business in California while the top executives never missed a paycheck. The film *The Informant!* depicts this narrative as the investigation into Archer Daniels Midland's price-fixing suddenly becomes about Mark Whitacre and his embezzlement scheme. He complains throughout the film about being 'dumped on' and how real criminals are not being pursued.

Mark Whitacre: I don't think what happened is fair, when you look at me compared to Mick and Terry. If you go and hold up your local grocery store... you get maybe five years in prison. Mick and Terry held up every grocery store in the world, and they got three. So, you tell me how it makes sense that I get nine.

The narrative continues to focus on Mark's transgressions. In the end, Mark ends up paying a hefty price for his crimes. However, those who committed even greater offences are sentenced to lenient jail time or receive no punishment at all, which one can deduce is because of their social status and influential friends in positions of power. Rob Bilott's class-action lawsuit in *Dark Waters* resulted in DuPont settling financially with all 3535 cases for 670.7 million dollars. No one is held responsible criminally even though their actions caused illness and death among the people of Parkersburg, WA. Important to note is that the chemical PFOA is now in almost every living creature on earth, thanks to DuPont. By the end of the film *The China Syndrome*, no individual pays the price for the dangers at Ventana. At the end of the film, it is insinuated that the word gets out through the media that Jack Godell is vindicated in that he was not a 'crazy man' and that his voice had merit – there are issues at Ventana. However, there is no on-screen narrative of anybody being held responsible for the structural catastrophe waiting to happen at

the plant. The film *Silkwood* depicts this narrative as nobody pays the price for the illnesses caused by radiation at the plant. All we know is Karen Silkwood has an armful of documents and is run off the road at the end of the film, insinuating that Kerr McGee had her murdered for her continued pursuit of exposing their practices. The film tells the audience that Karen's death in 1974 has not been ruled a murder and that the plant was shut down a year later.

A viewer's opinion at the end of corporate crime films is two-fold. They are satisfied that, in the end, their respected protagonist gets to the bottom of the investigation, the results are made public, and the victims are vindicated. Alternatively, viewers may feel disappointment in what happens to the perpetrators, in that their malfeasance has only cost them money, an almost meaningless punishment when they have so much.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study proposed to discover how occupational and corporate crime and criminals are depicted in film media and to determine common themes that will be useful in understanding if and how filmmakers can shape and influence audience views and perceptions of white-collar crimes and criminals. Twenty-three films were viewed multiple times, and data were collected using grounded theory coding, which enabled the researcher to identify the emerging themes. For the occupational crime films, the main themes discovered were: (1) Down on their Luck (2) The Ah-Ha Moment (Life Altering Moment), (3) Redemption (4) The Cover-Ups (5) Cooperation & Collaboration and (6) Glamourization. The main themes for the corporate crime films were: (1) The Element of Cover-up and Corporate Intimidation (2) Life Altering Moment or Chance Encounter (3) David vs. Goliath (4) Determined Advocate (5) True or Based on True Story and (6) Lack of Repercussion for Individual Perpetrators or the Corporation.

The findings support several criminological theories and related research, which were addressed earlier in the paper. Results of the study confirm the persistent presence of inequality in the justice system, which is the main component of conflict theory as it pertains to crime. A common theme in occupational and corporate crime films is that there is little or no punishment for the perpetrators. All the corporate crime films, and the majority of the occupational crime films in the sample were found to be true stories or based on actual events. The results of the study demonstrate that the harshest punishment received by any corporation was a monetary fine. The only occupational criminals in the films that went to jail were the characters in the fictional films. These findings support the findings of Cox et al., (2016) that

white-collar crimes typically go unpunished as opposed to common street crimes such as burglary or assault, even though the results and lasting effects of white-collar crime on society are far greater than street crimes (Garret, 2014; Simpson, 2019; Sutherland, 1940).

Social Constructionism theory which posits that society has ingrained in people, images and ideologies of what criminals look like, helps to explain and endorse the findings of (Rafter & Brown, 2011) why time and again corporate greed and wrongdoings are overlooked because they are not considered violent and because they are generally committed by those who are rich, powerful, and white, not a picture of the criminal that we have learned to expect. Social constructionism theory is affirmed in this research study, which found that the crimes are overlooked and often celebrated and glamorized, which is another common theme found in the films. In seven of the ten occupational crime films, greed, power, and money are glorified, depicting characters leading lavish excessive lifestyles. The audience applauds their actions and is rooting for a happy outcome for them. Whether or not an act is considered a crime is a socially constructed idea which can leave a grey area when it pertains to some corporate criminal acts. We find in this study for example, after poisoning water supplies, and adding illegal substances to cigarettes, corporations deny any wrong doing and deny that any crime has been committed; their actions are just part of doing business. The socially constructed idea that the rich and powerful at times are allowed to hurt regular people, and that it should be accepted as the cost of doing business is apparent in the films, as this defense appears to work with the justice system as found in the theme 'lack of repercussions' where in ten of the thirteen films in the sample, the corporations received only a fine or no punishment at all.

Labelling theory refers to a person's self-identification and behaviour being influenced or even determined by how they are labelled or classified in society. Being labelled a 'white-collar criminal' in and of itself is not necessarily the detriment that some may think. The crimes are complex, and those that commit them are typically well-off and well-educated, which leads to less severe punishment, and greater public tolerance. Through their research, Fredricks, McComas & Weatherby (2016) determined that white-collar criminals were generally labelled as a non-threatening and upper class by the public. They found this concerning as the public's positive and naïve views could leave them vulnerable to becoming victims of white-collar crime. Because of their sentiment, they would not be calling for harsher punishments for white-collar criminals by the justice system. White-collar criminals also perceive themselves as non-criminals as well as non-threatening. The findings of this study support the precepts of labelling theory and confirm the public's view of white-collar criminals found in various studies (Fredricks et al., 2016; Van Antwerp, 2011; Rafter et al., 2011) and reinforce the concern that the public is being misinformed or uninformed about the realities and dangers of white-collar crimes. Two themes found in the films studied unequivocally manipulate the audience's view of white-collar crime to approve of the perpetrator's criminality and root for their success. The manipulation begins with the theme called 'down on their luck.' The protagonist is introduced to the audience as unsuccessful but with big dreams, inducing sympathy for the character. The next theme called the 'Ah Ha or life-altering moment' is when the character is met with an unexpected 'business' opportunity to change their fate. At this point, the audience is already invested in the character, and the character's subsequent actions, no matter how illegal or immoral, are excused. These themes discovered in this study support findings by Appel &

Richter (2007), who concluded that views of the world could be altered by fictional information, even if it is false; and these themes are consistent with the research of Bandura (2001); Appel & Richter, (2007); Hoffman, (2013); Rafter & Brown, (2011), that media can affect public opinion, social realities, and public perception. Additional themes found in the occupational films that reinforce the audience's opinion that the character they are invested in is 'good' are character transformation and redemption, uncovering a sinister plot, and co-operating with law enforcement. The character usually follows these themes when their criminal world begins to come crashing down on them. However, it still allows the character to redeem themselves in the audience's eyes and showcase that there are more sinister characters at work in the film than themselves.

Although audiences tend to root for occupational white-collar criminals, take pleasure in their pursuit of greed and excess, and excuse their transgressions, they do not root for those committing a corporate crime, nor do filmmakers encourage them to do so. Of the corporate films viewed for this study, all were true stories or closely based on real events. These films are important for allowing viewers to learn of various corporate crimes they otherwise would not know about or may not fully understand. Many corporate crimes, such as polluting our air and water and disposing of harmful waste, affect everyone, not just individuals (Rafter & Brown, 2011; Sutherland, 1940; Leighton, 2013). The main themes that emerged in this study are Element of Cover-up or Corporate Intimidation. The corporation goes into denial mode when accused of wrongdoing, which reinforces the audience's preconceived notion that corporations are too powerful. The theme of Life-altering moment or chance encounter also occurs in occupational crime films, but in this group, the chance encounter is by the 'good guy' who leads

the battle against the evil corporation. This character also leads the theme of Determined Advocate, as they stop at nothing and sacrifice everything to continue the fight. David vs. Goliath is a prevalent theme in corporate crime films which references the 'little guy' standing up to the 'rich and powerful.' As a byproduct of his study on the motivation of film makers to negatively portray big business, Ribstein (2012) also discovered the common theme of David vs. Goliath, and explained "a cinematically satisfying story will have an outsider have-not like Erin Brockovich battling the fancy corporate suits" (p. 234), which is consistent with findings of this study. Audiences love an underdog and support their fight against corporate and institutional corruption. The theme of Lack of Repercussion is consistent with research by (Cox et al., 2016; Rafter & Brown, 2011; Sutherland, 1940; Leighton, 2013). As noted, all but two of these films are true stories, with the remaining two closely based on true stories and ten of the thirteen received a fine or no punishment at all. Two films of the group depicted the relatively recent global financial collapse. In both of those instances, it was determined that the cause of the collapse was greed, and yet not one person went to jail, and most of them ended up more prosperous than they were before it happened. The corporate crime films are all extraordinary examples that could be used to support criminological conflict theories, which according to C. Wright Mills (1956), posits that the rich and powerful create the laws and rules and then apply the laws and rules as they see fit which explains why they go unpunished.

Victimology is addressed differently in the two types of white-collar crime films. In the occupational crimes viewed, very little or no attention was paid to the victims of the occupational criminal's actions. If the sentiment of the film is to corrupt the audience's opinion of the white-collar criminal to innocence, this can be solidified by not calling attention to the

harms that the crimes have had on the victims. This study is consistent with the findings of (Rafter & Brown, 2011), who determined that the victims of white-collar crime are often faceless, nameless people. Conversely, in the corporate crime films viewed, victimology is a primary component to dramatizing events that resonate with the audience whose unfavourable views on corporate crime are previously determined. Welsh et al. (2011) determined that films shape society through social learning. The 'current attitudes and tensions' of society also shapes films in that filmmakers want to give audiences the stories and outcomes that they want to attract those audiences and increase profits. Filmmakers go to great lengths to represent corporations as sinister, greedy, and merciless in their efforts to mirror public opinion and give the audience a happy ending when the 'little guy' wins the fight against them. However, the happy ending provided is, in reality only an illusion of winning, as the corporation and its representatives are rarely held responsible or made accountable for their crimes in a meaningful way, as concluded by (Garrett 2014; Simpson, 2019). The critical element and objective of the film production business is profit. To achieve that goal, the films must appeal to their audiences. For this reason, although it would be ideal for films to deliver the events and circumstances of crime responsibly and truthfully to inform and protect the public from becoming possible victims, this is not their job. Their purpose is to entertain, not to educate.

Conclusion

This study provided a thorough analysis of how corporate and occupational crimes are depicted in films by exposing the most common themes constructed by filmmakers. The research findings show that these themes support and are consistent with the findings of

existing accepted research studies and contribute evidence for the relevant theoretical insights of conflict, social constructionism and labelling. The findings of this study demonstrate the ability of the media, specifically films, to shape the views and opinions of their audience as they pertain to white-collar crime and criminals and offer concern that misinformation may be exasperating the over-looking of white-collar crime in society.

Suggestions for Further Research

I suggest that a continuation of this research study that focuses on specific character themes in films may offer more insight into how filmmakers use their media outlets to shape public views and society. This research may also contribute to a further endorsement of existing research findings and relevant criminological theories. Another possible extension of this research study may be to focus specifically on victimology and its portrayal in the films, along with the concerns that may follow those findings.

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