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# The Criminal Selfie: Conveying Grievance While Recording and Live Streaming Antisocial Behavior

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## Abstract

Despite attempts to regulate content, social media platforms continue to host images of antisocial behavior and crime. These images include dashboard videos of road rage and CCTV footage of shoplifting, as well as more extreme recordings of torture, sexual assault, suicide, and mass shootings. These images are often produced by offenders of their own volition using smartphone cameras and wearable recording devices. We understand criminal selfies as media content of antisocial behavior or crime produced by or with the awareness of an offender. By producing a criminal selfie, an offender renders themselves vulnerable to public scrutiny, legal punishment, and other negative outcomes. Yet criminal selfies remain a popular form of toxic online communication. This manuscript theorizes that one of the previously underappreciated explanations for criminal selfies is a desire to broadcast personal grievances. In such cases, they allow an offender to publicize their motivating politics and to offer them to an online audience for consideration and discussion. Antisocial content often evokes an unfavorable ratio of denunciation versus supportive responses. We claim that some offenders wager that a criminal selfie nonetheless earns their grievances a degree of awareness and, potentially, consequence. Some criminal selfies reflect a willingness to self-incriminate by documenting antisocial behavior in hopes that their images will contribute to public discourse. This article contributes to studies of criminal visibility by addressing how it can be intended as political expression. We first outline the concept of the criminal selfie and how it reflects a changing relationship between visibility and criminality in contemporary digital society. We then review literature on the motives of criminals who film themselves. We seek to compliment this literature by considering socially and politically aggrieved individuals producing antisocial content. This includes livestreams of white nationalist mass shootings (Christchurch, Halle) as well as a series of Reddit groups that solicit and (counter-)denounce antisocial grievances by digital media users (r/iamverybadass, r/publicfreakout, r/iamatotalpieceofshit).

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## Introduction

Despite growing efforts to regulate online content, social media platforms continue to host images of antisocial behavior (Yar, 2018; Williams et al., 2019). These include dashboard videos of traffic accidents and surveillance camera footage of public intoxication, but also more extreme recordings of torture,[1] sexual assault,[2] suicide,[3] and mass shootings.[4][5] Curiously, these images are not necessarily of wrongdoers who have inadvertently been "caught on tape." Rather, these images are sometimes produced by individuals of their own volition using smartphone cameras and wearable recording devices. Consider the political transgressors who livestreamed their participation in the January 6th insurrection in the USA (Jeppesen, 2022).[6] Radical supporters of Donald Trump streamed footage of themselves breaking into governmental buildings and assaulting police officers. Despite reputational harm and possible jail time, a subset of these radicals circulated images of their actions to direct attention to personal grievances and collective political beliefs. Nonetheless, resulting videos were used to expose and humiliate these political transgressors and sometimes used to support their criminal convictions.

As part of a larger effort to understand the creation and sharing of self-surveillance footage, we offer the concept of "criminal selfies." This term refers to images of transgressive behavior produced by or with the awareness of the transgressor as they break social conventions and/or formal laws. Note that while we use the term "criminal," the criminal selfie concept can be used to describe the recording of a variety of antisocial behaviors. The flexibility of the concept is a recognition that a diversity of wrongdoers record a diversity of transgressive behaviors for a diversity of reasons. Some of these transgressive behaviors are criminalized, others are not.[7] Some of these transgressive behaviors are discovered by the criminal justice system, others are not. Some of these transgressive behaviors are criminalized in the jurisdictions of the viewer but not in the jurisdiction of the offender, and vice versa. Thus, the criminal selfie concept remains flexible to recognize a variety of behaviors, including those which are harmful, antisocial, and immoral but not necessarily criminalized across all jurisdictions.

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[1] See The Desire to Live-Stream Violence: https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/01/chicago-beating-facebook-live/512288/.

[2] See Teenager is Accused of Live-Streaming a Friend's Rape on Periscope: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/19/us/periscope-rape-case-columbus-ohio-video-livestreaming.html.

[3] See Suicide on Periscope Prompts French Officials to Open Inquiry: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/12/world/europe/periscope-suicide-france.html.

[4] See Christchurch gunman pleads guilty to New Zealand mosque attacks that killed 51: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/26/christchurch-shooting-brenton-tarrant-pleads-guilty-to-new-zealand-mosque-attacks-that-killed-51.

[5] See Germany shooting suspect livestreamed attempted attack on synagogue: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/09/germany-shooting-synagogue-halle-livestreamed.

[6] See Pro-Trump Mob Livestreamed Its Rampage, and Made Money Doing It: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/08/technology/dlive-capitol-mob.html.

[7] In the case of digitally mediated offences, we may see antisocial acts become criminal ones: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/a-guide-to-the-online-safety-bill.

By capturing a criminal selfie, a wrongdoer renders themselves vulnerable to public scrutiny, legal punishment, and other presumably undesirable repercussions. Yet criminal selfies are a popular form of toxic online content. They have become so prominent that they have inspired new antisocial trends such as "happy slapping," violent actions against strangers committed solely for the opportunity to create self-exposing footage (Yar, 2012). Such trends reveal that criminal selfies are created by persons who know their actions have been deemed wrong and/or illegal. Many of these people also know that the capturing and broadcasting of their footage is itself an antisocial communicative act that may cross legal boundaries. Given the likelihood that criminal selfies expose the offender's actions and potentially contribute to their public shaming and criminal conviction, the production of criminal selfies may be perplexing. In this paper, we are interested in the discursive justification of capturing and sharing criminal selfies given by the perpetrator-cum-content creator.

Like all selfies, the motivations behind the creation and sharing of criminal selfies are diverse and may diverge (Etgar & Amichai-Hamburger, 2017). Extending from earlier work on voluntary forms of "selfie incrimination" (Fish & Follis, 2016), we argue that one of the previously underappreciated motivations for criminal selfies is the desire to broadcast personal grievances. Criminal selfies allow a perpetrator to publicize personal outrage to an online audience for consideration. Such selfies can be met with an unfavorable ratio of denunciations versus supportive responses. Some perpetrators nonetheless wager that a criminal selfie earns their grievances a degree of awareness and, potentially, empathy. Such criminal selfies may reflect a perpetrator's willingness to incriminate themselves in hopes that their images will contribute to public discourse, especially when those personal grievances are tied to larger political concerns. Whereas earlier studies on un-masking consider how perpetrators knowingly disclose their identities in the name of public interest (ibid.), our understanding of criminal selfies spotlights perpetrators who disclose their identities in the name of personalized grievances intended to circulate through attention-based media networks. The primary goal of this article is to contribute to emerging literature explaining the recording and streaming of antisocial behavior as a means to generate attention to personal grievance—a practice that is both enhanced and contested by an assembly of media actors. By developing the criminal selfie concept, we offer a tool that researchers can use to better comprehend the circulation of images which result from what Surette (2015) calls "performance crimes."

We begin this article by outlining the criminal selfie concept and how it reflects a changing relationship between visibility and antisocial behavior in digital society (Powell et al., 2018). After reviewing literature on the motivations of transgressors who film their antisocial behaviors, we develop an understanding of the criminal selfie as an assembled practice of visibility. In considering examples of criminal selfies used to air grievances, we juxtapose minor forms of antisociality on thematic subreddit communities alongside high profile mass shootings used to express racist politics. We then consider the complexities surrounding the relationship between criminal selfies and public discourse by considering the roles of social media platforms as well as social media users in the production and distribution of criminal selfies. Before we begin, we acknowledge the limitations of seeking to understand a transgressor's motivations for their antisocial behavior. Committing and filming antisocial acts must be explained by considering multiple factors and therefore require a plurality of theoretical explanations. Our analysis nonetheless highlights the role of expressing grievances when understanding what motivates digital media users to film their offences.

## What Is a Criminal Selfie?

Selfies broadly refer to images of an individual or from an individual's perspective created of their own volition and using a camera that is, to some extent, under their control (Hess, 2015; Frosh, 2015). The selfie is exemplary of the "post-photographic" era when an image no longer has any sense of third party objectivity and instead acknowledges the photographer as both the subject and designer of an image (ibid.). Selfies are commonly uploaded on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok where they are produced using media editing software and publicized using hashtags and labels. The term selfie was originally used to refer to still-images, but as video creation and video sharing has become easier and more common, selfie can refer to a variety of self-surveillance images, including still-images, video recordings, and live-streaming videos. Thus, the selfie has become a flexible concept defined primarily by the role of its subject in its creation.

Various production and distribution processes prepare selfies for consumption in the "attention economy" (Marwick, 2015). Some selfies are carefully edited to display one's physical beauty. These selfies can then be shared via social media platforms such as Instagram where they can be viewed and commented on by a global audience. Other selfies prioritize the political commentary of the subject. These selfies are shared via social media platforms such as YouTube, where they can contribute to online political discourse. Of course, the purpose of any single social media platform is diverse, and it is common for the same selfies to be shared across platforms. The point then is that selfies are created for diverse reasons, can be uploaded to diverse social media platforms, and can be appropriated for diverse purposes. Given the range of user practices, production techniques, and platforms, the selfie is best understood as an umbrella concept referring to a variety of images that an individual creates of themselves and for online and largely unknown audiences. We thus adopt an inclusive definition of selfies, accounting for still-images recorded by a subject to document their physical appearance, video-images recorded from a photographer's point of view to document their personal experiences, as well as live-streamed images recorded by a subject to document their interactions with other peoples, including authority figures.

Selfies can document several activities but trend towards favorable and hyperreal representation of the photographer. They often feature symbols of success, wealth, and an idealized body type that the photographer uses to earn cultural influence and economic gains, also known as "instafame" (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020; Marwick, 2015). Yet, one can easily find examples of selfies on social media featuring radically divergent ideals. These include images of substance abuse, racist commentary, mistakes with significant consequences—also known as "fails," as well as antisocial behaviors of all types (Yar, 2012; Pennington & Birthisel, 2016). Rather than documenting an idealized version of the self, these selfies feature images contributing to the shaming and/or criminalization the photographer for what are commonly understood as antisocial and illegal behaviors. Thus, criminal selfies reveal the diverse and everchanging relationship between the offender and their visibility.

Whereas the criminal's visibility has historically been understood through theories of surveillance cameras and crime-prevention (Norris & Armstrong, 1999), recent theories highlight the complex and heterogeneous features of the crime-visibility relationship. Today, antisocial behavior is captured by multiple "regimes of visibility," each featuring different technological and motivational qualities as well as different implications for the wrongdoer (Brighenti, 2010). Antisocial behavior could be captured by a surveillance camera operated by a commercial

organization (Norris & Armstrong, 1999), a body-worn camera attached to a police officer's chest (White & Malm, 2020), a camcorder in a bystander's hands (Goldsmith, 2010), and a professional video camera capturing footage for a reality-TV show (Doyle, 1998). Each camera is operated by a user with their own motivations. Each device can also have differing and even clashing implications for a transgressor. Some, for example, are motivated by a desire to deter the transgressor from doing wrong, whereas others aim to produce the most entertaining footage and gain advertising revenue. As such, a transgressor's total visibility is a function of numerous and networked regimes of visibility or a "surveillant assemblage" (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000). The assembled nature of a wrongdoer's visibility means it is a multi-layered phenomenon as is recognized by surveillance literature discussing the diversity of surveillance systems that operate in many directions and across social hierarchies (Doyle, 2011; Mathiesen, 1997; Monahan, 2006).

Criminal selfies, we argue, represent a unique contribution to this surveillance assemblage. Its uniqueness becomes apparent when considering the motivation of its creator. Unlike the previously mentioned cameras monitoring the offender, the criminal selfie is produced using the offender's camera and reflects the offender's vantage point. Thus, the criminal selfie represents themes of self-representation and adds alternative perspectives to surveillant assemblages, offering viewers a new way of understanding any of the antisocial behaviors being recorded. The realization that antisocial behavior and visibility have a relationship beyond order management has informed studies exploring how the invention of smartphone cameras and social media platforms enable new opportunities to create, share, and access videos of antisocial behavior and criminal justice (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Burgess & Green, 2018). For example, criminologists have studied how the "citizen journalist" uses their smartphone camera and social media platform to document and investigate antisocial behavior, what is commonly known as "web sleuthing" (Yardley & Wilson, 2015; Yardley et al., 2018). Still, much of this literature focuses on the use of cameras to document, expose, and shame wrongdoers against their will. We move beyond this focus by addressing how wrongdoers use the same tools to willingly bring attention to their crimes and related grievances.

We acknowledge that this filming amounts to an act of self-incrimination as transgressors, sometimes naively, contribute to their own exposure and, in some cases, their own conviction in a court of law. Consider the case of a 16-year-old in the USA charged with first degree murder after police discovered that he murdered his classmate.[8] Police confirmed their finding after the youth shared a criminal selfie over Snapchat admitting to the murder. Or consider a UK-based drug mule who posted a celebratory selfie showing him kissing the banknotes he earned after distributing heroin and cocaine.[9] Despite the self-harmful quality of all criminal selfies, we propose that these images do not always reflect the offenders' naivety. Offenders, in some cases, intend to use their criminal selfies to achieve personal and political goals.

## What Motivates the Filming of Criminal Selfies?

Research asking what motivates selfies point to a plurality of answers (Etgar & Amichai-Hamburger, 2017). Selfies can be motivated by goals such as attention seeking, self-expression, archiving personal history, and a desire to entertain others (Sung et al., 2016; Murray,

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[8] See Snapchat selfie unmasked Pittsburgh killer, police say: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-31294752.

[9] See Drugs mule caught after taking selfies counting and kissing banknotes: https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/drugs-mule-peter-cavanagh-caught-2246435.

2015). Selfies can also be motivated by economic goals as content creators use them to publicize products and services (Marwick, 2015). Alternatively or simultaneously, creating and sharing selfies can be motivated by personal goals such as achieving the approval and support of large audiences through clicks, likes, views, and other forms of digital feedback (Barry et al., 2019). While motivations can differ, what stands out is that the selfie is a multifaceted tool. The same is true of criminal selfies.

Compelling evidence of the diverse motivations behind criminal selfies can be found in literature discussing "image based sexual abuse" (Powell & Henry, 2017). Images of sexual abuse reflect a radical shift away from previous efforts among abusers to conceal their sexual abuse, often by silencing and shaming victims. Instead, image based sexual abuse reflects an abuser's willingness to expose their actions and make themselves vulnerable to criticism and legal repercussion. Researchers explain this self-incrimination by highlighting the perceived benefits of criminal selfies. For example, researchers claim some abusers find filming sexual abuse a gratifying act akin to producing a sex tape which memorializes sexual experiences (ibid.). Abusers may also create and share images of sexual abuse to humiliate victims and for economic benefit (Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2017; Powell & Henry, 2017). For example, abusers can blackmail victims by threatening to share potentially humiliating sexual images unless they pay a fee (Sandberg & Ugelvik, 2017). Many of these motivations reflect a culture of mass-mediated humiliation where images are used to both entertain audiences and punish those who have been filmed (Kohm, 2009). We add to this literature by discussing additional motivations behind the creation and sharing of criminal selfies.

## Criminal Selfies as Antisocial Expression of Grievances

We argue that a prominent function of criminal selfies is for wrongdoers to publicize their personal grievances and to shape political discourse in some capacity. In such cases, the criminal selfie represents the explicit confluence of antisocial behavior, politicking, and visibility. To illustrate the motivations behind some criminal selfies, we narrow our focus to wrongdoers who commit and film antisocial behavior motivated by personal grievances, often tied to broader politicized issues.

We clarify that such a perpetrator, though politically minded, is not necessarily a member of a formal governmental or civic organization. This perpetrator may hold sympathies to an electable political party, but they may likewise hold beliefs that are loosely aligned with a more amorphous political movement. This perpetrator's political participation may, therefore, not feature campaigning under a formal political organization's banner. Instead, it may be limited to political participation via social media platforms where they share political content including criminal selfies. Though they are not involved in formal politics, we nonetheless frame these perpetrators as political actors. To justify this framing, we draw on Chantal Mouffe's understanding of the political as "the ensemble of discourses, institutions and practices which aim at establishing an order; at organizing human coexistence, in a context that is always conflictual because of the presence of the political" (1993, 8). Mouffe's definition recognizes any actor who tries at contributing to the establishing of an order, including those acting outside of formal institutions. We argue that an offender who films their antisocial behaviors makes such an effort by creating and sharing footage to publicize their personal grievances and related political opinions. In the society of

"self-disclosure," such an offender is one of many actors who intends to use personal visibility as a political tool (Thompson, 2005).

There are multiple examples of such criminal selfies. Consider the case of a suspected gang member who, in 2015, posted a video on Instagram showing himself in a vehicle pointing a handgun at a police patrol car. In the video, he can be heard saying "Fuck the Police." His anti-police politics are outright, and the video seems an attempt to publicize these views. Unfortunately for the suspect, police discovered the video online and later served a search warrant at the suspect's home in California. The suspect was taken to a local county jail soon after for possession of a concealed and unregistered firearm in a vehicle and for involvement in a criminal gang.[10]

We address two more examples of wrongdoers who record their antisocial behavior to substantiate the relationship between antisocial behavior, the expression of grievance, and politicking. To illustrate the diversity of wrongdoers who record antisocial behaviors to publicize grievances and political views, we will use two very different examples. The examples diverge primarily in the extremity of the antisocial behaviors being recorded. They have been selected to highlight the consistency of expressing grievances and politicking as a motivation for criminal selfies despite the differences between the antisocial behaviors being recorded.

## Criminal Selfies: Recording Antisocial Pettiness

Criminal selfies include images of mundane antisocial acts tied to personal grievances. Consider a recent example involving a less prominent TikTok user. While at the beach with their mother, this TikTok user noticed another couple installing themselves directly in front of the user, blocking the user's view of the sea. In a twenty-eight second clip, the TikTok user films the couple along with a caption "A whole beach and this couple chooses to sit right in front of us." The clip then features the user's mother walking past the couple and sprinkling some chip fragments behind their chairs. A flock of birds gathers to feast on the snack, disturbing the couple. At the end of the clip, we see the couple relocating, with the caption "Move….". This video features relatively mild antisocial behavior towards fellow beachgoers which is in turn justified by a perceived grievance. Despite commanding a follower count of just over 7000, the video garnered 8.5 million views, with commenters on the platform seemingly split between support and condemnation of the mother's actions.[11] While their actions may not be illegal, this TikTok user risks reputational harm by intentionally sharing antisocial footage. Both supportive and denunciatory responses from a dispersed audience seem to enable the user's motivation to share their grievances with an attentive and engaged audience. Remarkably, the decision to record and publish this footage seems to remain unquestioned in these comments.

Several online venues, including *vt.co* and *Yahoo! Lifestyle* reported on the video, publishing links to the TikTok user's account, screenshots of the video, and quotes from the comments generated by the clip. The latter seem to play a pivotal role as an approximation

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[10] See Instagram video shows suspect pointing gun at patrol car: https://www.kcra.com/article/police-instagram-video-shows-suspect-pointing-gun-at-patrol-car/6426213.

[11] See Woman's "petty" revenge on couple who sat in front of her at the beach divides social media users: https://vt.co/lifestyle/travel/womans-petty-revenge-on-couple-who-sat-in-front-of-her-at-the-beach-divides-social-media-users.

for public sentiment, as well as for providing prosaic substance to the article. A Reddit post entitled "Karen on Karen crime" also remediated the short video, generating an additional 758 comments. These were housed in an online community entitled "r/iamatotalpieceof-shit," a subreddit which we discuss later in this paper.

Antisociality prevails in this example of online communication, as the original footage features a kind of tit-for-tat in terms of improper beach behavior. One of the transgressors in this incident produces media footage that simultaneously condemns her rival's deeds, while praising her mother's. This is then circulated (seemingly without the TikTok user's consent) on public fora (including lifestyle websites, tabloids, and user-generated communities) that either support or denounce these actions, often accompanied by further antisocial statements. We can locate other expressions of daily frustrations through antisocial self-representations when considering hacktivism as well diverse urban subcultures (Lee et al., 2022). Virtually any mediated context offers transgressors an opportunity to risk infamy in order to share footage with "a waiting audience" who may grant legitimacy to both their grievances and their actions (Surette, 2015, 200).

## Criminal Selfies: Recording Mass Shootings

Criminal selfies also involve the recording of more extreme behaviors which explicitly violate law and cause significant and physical harm to others. These include criminal selfies of mass shootings carried out by perpetrators who record and/or livestream point-of-view footage. Livestreaming versus recording and uploading an antisocial event may reflect different motivations on the part of the perpetrator (Urbas, 2021). Yet the difference between these means of diffusion is less evident when we consider how other digital media users routinely capture livestreams and re-upload them independently, as seen below. We also recognize that the ethics of using these cases and citing the names of mass shooters are complex as our analysis inadvertently contributes to the mass shooter's goals of spreading information about their personal grievances and political views. Accordingly, we do not reference the name of any mass shooter.

Among the most infamous examples of a criminal selfie comes from the case of a 28-year-old white male who we will refer to as the assailant. On March 15, 2019, the assailant attacked two Mosques in Christchurch New Zealand with an arsenal of semi-automatic weapons. The attacks began at Al Noor Mosque at 1:40 pm, while approximately five-hundred people were inside. The shootings were filmed using a helmet-mounted camera and live-streamed on Facebook.[12] After live streaming for approximately seventeen minutes, the assailant left Al Noor Mosque, collected another gun from his vehicle, and traveled approximately five kilometers to the Linwood Islamic Centre to continue his attack. The shooting ended when a man drew the assailant's attention away from his targets by throwing an empty shotgun at the assailant's vehicle. The assailant responded by driving away. Approximately twenty-one minutes after an initial emergency call, local police arrested the assailant at gunpoint after ramming his vehicle off the road.

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[12]  See Social media firms fight to delete Christchurch shooting footage: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/15/video-of-christchurch-attack-runs-on-social-media-and-news-sites.

By then, the assailant had killed fifty-one people and injured forty more.[13] On March 26, 2020, the assailant pled guilty to over ninety criminal charges and was sentenced to life without parole.[14]

The Christchurch shootings are further evidence of a desire among some transgressors to utilize their visibility for the expression of personal grievances and related political views. The assailant detailed these grievances in a seventy-four-page manifesto which he posted on Twitter immediately before his attacks. The manifesto stated that majority-white nations are being invaded by immigrants and racialized peoples, and consequently, cultures and lifestyles that the assailant associated with whiteness faced a threat of being supplanted. The assailant described this as "white genocide" and clarified that the actions-to-follow were an effort "to show the invaders that our lands will never be their lands…." By creating criminal selfies then, the assailant used visibility to publicize a hateful statement about white ownership over New Zealand. Visibility was, therefore, not a deterrent to crime but a resource used to publicize a white man's grievances and violence.

The assailant's criminal selfie was uploaded to various social media platforms, reflecting an agnostic approach to any single venue being a sustainable home for their grievances (cf. Brooks et al., 2021). The footage had to be deleted repeatedly by the social media platforms which explicitly denounced the assailant's actions.[15] New Zealand's then prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, responded to the continued spread of assailant's criminal selfies by creating the "Christchurch Call." This act was meant to tackle politics which the assailant intended to spread by filming and posting videos of their crimes.[16] Signatories to the Christchurch Call included Google, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The Christchurch Call initiated a coordinated effort to reduce the assailant's visibility in recognition that his footage was being used to publicize racist politics. Despite that effort, over 300,000 versions of assailant's videos were ultimately published online.[17] The Christchurch shootings not only illustrate the political motivations underlying some criminal selfies, but also the capacity for criminal selfies to reach an audience notwithstanding restrictions imposed by governments and the social media platforms which host said selfies. Among the easiest places to find this content despite governmental efforts to restrict its online presence is Reddit.com.

There is a clear difference between an aggrieved person committing a mass shooting and simply upsetting their peers' sensibilities during a visit to the beach. Our concern is how media practice seamlessly oversteps this boundary in circulating and commenting on these public grievances. Whether major crimes or minor nuisances, individuals create and circulate content of their transgressions, often as a public expression of their grievances. In either case, they are likely to generate counter-denunciation—or denunciations of denunciations—from those who in turn are aggrieved by this footage. We may expect such counter-denunciations to be proportionate to

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[13] See 49 shot dead in attack on two Christchurch mosques: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/15/multiple-fatalities-gunman-christchurch-mosque-shooting.

[14] See Christchurch mosque attack: Suspect sentenced to life without parole: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53919624.

[15] See Facebook removed 1.5m videos of New Zealand terror attack in first 24 hours: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/17/facebook-removed-15m-videos-new-zealand-terror-attack.

[16] See Christchurch Call: details emerge of Ardern's plan to tackle online extremism: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/13/christchurch-call-details-emerge-of-arderns-plan-to-tackle-online-extremism.

[17] See Censor bans "manifesto" of Christchurch mosque shooter: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/24/censor-bans-manifesto-of-christchurch-mosque-shooter.

the severity of the transgression. Yet platforms like Reddit seek to maximize engagement from any available content. Major crimes and antisocial nuisances are frequently placed next to each other on Reddit's front page. In one sense, not all grievance-based criminal selfies are the same, as exceptional criminal events shape media practice through measures like the "Christchurch Call." Yet even if livestream footage is scrubbed from platforms like Reddit, the transgression itself—and the motives of the perpetrator—remain the subject of discussion and public engagement. These wildly diverse transgressions are met with comparable responses as a form of media engagement.

## Subreddits as Unintended Destinations for Criminal Selfies

Despite efforts to erase content and prevent sharing, social media users often copy and redistribute criminal selfies. Reddit is a popular venue for this process of re-uploading and re-circulation. Accordingly, an understanding of criminal selfies requires a consideration of the role of social media platforms and social media users, and Reddit may deserve special attention. Reddit is made up of multiple forums or "subreddits" with an identifying and sometimes controversial theme. A prominent yet under-explored genre of subreddits is dedicated to publishing and commenting on other people engaging in antisocial and otherwise actionable behavior. Relevant subreddits here are identified with names like "r/iamverybadass," "r/publicfreakout," and the aforementioned "r/iamatotalpieceofshit." These subreddits are decentralized, in the sense that the rules governing content production can depend on the specific subreddit being viewed. Accordingly, content that is deemed abnormal or unacceptable on other social media platforms can become quite popular on these subreddits.

Such subreddits also offer opportunities for commentary on the grievances and political views of the people engaged in antisocial behavior that has been recorded. For example, a recent post features a screenshot of a Facebook post where a mother threatens violence on those who breastfeed in public, augmenting this antisocial grievance with hashtags like #zerocare, #why, and #inpubliccletsjustshowkidsboobs.[18] The majority of the 751 comments to this post openly denounce the woman, with some users going so far as to threaten violence against the perpetrator in a hypothetical encounter. Antisocial content is thus co-opted when it is posted on subreddits allowing viewers to reposition their grievances as actionable. This is one example of counter-denunciations that mobilize user activity and thus fuels engagement with such platforms. While perpetrators release criminal selfies to express their grievances, an assembly of social media actors will simultaneously condemn, condone, and otherwise comment on their content. Criminal selfies are thus a scalable means to express grievances, and a relinquishing of control over that message. A likely outcome for criminal selfies is inclusion in curated outrage streams. Reddit has a history of cultivating hate-based communities and, in recent years, has taken steps to cull more problematic content and groups, including those espousing racial and gender-based hatred (Fiesler et al., 2018). In terms of antisociality, the act being filmed, and the original act of filming itself may be considered actionable. Yet Reddit's decentralized governance via group-specific rules and moderation (Trottier & Woodhead, 2023) can be considered an attempt to sanitize the practice of consuming such footage, such that what remains is framed by the platform as prosocial forms of public denunciation.

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[18]  See I'll beat you if you feed your child: https://www.reddit.com/r/iamatotalpieceofshit/comments/y9904n/ill_beat_you_if_you_feed_your_child/.

## Discussion

Some may question our characterization of criminal selfies by arguing that it overemphasizes rationality when explaining a transgressor's use of visibility. It is possible that the Christchurch assailant never reflected on the consequences of filming their crimes. It is possible that he did not intend to utilize the resulting footage politically. We acknowledge that a diversity of factors must be considered when examining the motivations underlying the production of criminal selfies. However, given the political motivations revealed in accompanying content like manifestos, we argue that criminal selfies cannot be understood without acknowledging a wrongdoer's intention to publicize both their visual and political points of view. Though criminal selfies may lead to a transgressor's social, economic, and potentially physical demise, the cases mentioned above suggest that some transgressors believe that political expression is, to some extent, worth those costs.

The above examples also highlight the diversity of actors involved in the production of criminal selfies. While offenders are the primary authors of criminal selfies, they are not solely responsible for how their content is subsequently labeled, distributed, and interpreted. Instead, criminal selfies are a product of disparate "mediators" working together to render antisocial behavior visible. These mediators include governmental actors who can regulate the publication of criminal selfies, mainstream news media who decide how to report on criminal selfies, as well as social media companies who determine what videos are uploaded to their websites. As a primary producer of public knowledge in the "platform society" (Van Dijck et al., 2018), social media websites are in a particularly influential role in the mediation of criminal selfies. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube determine if videos of antisocial behavior will be available to the public and the discourses that will render them meaningful. Thus, social media platforms' treatment of criminal selfies and their contribution to efforts to share or, alternatively, censor require special focus in ongoing studies of criminal selfies. This raises ethical considerations which social media companies have recently begun to investigate as they address questions about their allowance of crime footage to exist on their platforms (Yar, 2018). These questions include: should explicitly antisocial acts be viewable on their platforms? And should the political ideologies underlying these actions influence their accessibility?

In addition, as was seen in the Christchurch shootings, internet users also play a mediator role in the prolonged existence of criminal selfies as they re-upload, re-share, and use other techniques to keep a criminal's footage available despite the best efforts of social media platforms. As such, internet users must also be understood as mediators who enable the virality of a criminal selfie. This suggests a second area of inquiry into the relationship between antisocial behavior and visibility: how do social media users determine what sorts of videos will be viewed, shared, and re-uploaded, even after social media companies delete them? Should users who share videos of extreme antisocial behavior be removed from social media platforms? These questions reflect how social media companies struggle to contain criminal selfies even after they ascribe to policies like the Christchurch Call.

## Conclusion

Smartphones and social media platforms afford citizens the opportunity to produce amateur content broadcasting their everyday lives for others to view. Voluntarily sharing these videos can involve the production of selfies as one travels the world, spends money on expensive goods, and graduates from school (Hess, 2015; Marwick, 2015). This amateur

content creation has a complex relationship to antisocial behavior as it is sometimes used by "citizens journalists" who document wrongdoers as well as "digilantes" who investigate crimes (Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Nhan et al., 2017). We argue that an understudied and overlapping feature of this content creation is the use of cameras and social media to share images of an individual's wrong doings. We explain that this self-incrimination can be explained by considering a perpetrator's aim to memorialize antisocial behavior and humiliate victims, but also to publicize their personal grievances and political beliefs.

Our conclusion is reflective of more general theoretical deliberations about the empowering qualities of visibility. Andrea Brighenti (2010) argues that it is a mistake to simplify visibility using theoretical models of top-down monitoring and Orwellian control. Instead, visibility is often a means of empowerment, especially in an era of social media which can generate opportunities for formerly invisible individuals to bring attention to their personal experiences and beliefs. Some could celebrate the potentially empowering qualities of this visibility as it can translate into opportunities for self-expression among communities who are otherwise underrepresented. Such theories can be found in literature discussing "video activism" and "digilantism" (Kaufhold et al., 2010; Goode, 2009; Antony & Thomas, 2010). We argue that the same opportunities for empowerment can be mobilized by offenders who use cameras and social media platforms to film and share images of antisocial behavior to draw attention to personal grievances and political causes. Of course, the empowering qualities of this visibility are not rigid. Following Brighenti (2010), visibility often means the barrier between empowerment and vulnerability is compromised. Visibility can thus be understood as a pathway to attention and expression as well as exploitation and harassment. Accordingly, the criminal selfie cannot be understood solely as a tool used by an empowered transgressor. Instead, as seen by the examples mentioned already, the benefits of visibility are often undercut by having controversial politics counter-denounced by viewers. The criminal selfie is a tool which makes it easier to view, but also locate, pursue, detain, and reject an offender and their views. It seems that some offenders are, nonetheless, willing to face such vulnerabilities for what they consider the opportunity to bring awareness to their grievances and associated politics.

## Declarations

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