ARTICLE

Writing for digital news about HIV criminalization in canada

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Abstract

For years, HIV activists in Canada have expressed serious concerns about the stigmatizing and sensational way that HIV criminalization is portrayed in the mainstream press. Discourse analyses of the content of news stories about HIV criminalization confirm that news reports of HIV criminal cases rely on sensational language and reproduce negative stereotypes of people living with HIV. This paper contributes to social justice scholarship in the area by building upon studies of news content to uncover how news reports of HIV criminalization are produced in the first place. Through institutional ethnographic interviews with journalists who produce news stories about HIV criminalization, this study brings into view that conditions of convergence journalism make it exceedingly difficult for reporters to disrupt the genre of crime stories about HIV criminalization in which stigmatizing discourses proliferate.

RÉSUMÉ

Pendant des années, les activistes du VIH au Canada ont exprimé de sérieuses inquiétudes quant à la manière stigmatisante et sensationnelle dont la criminalisation du VIH est dépeinte dans la presse grand public. Les analyses de discours du contenu des reportages sur la criminalisation du VIH confirment que les reportages

sur les affaires criminelles liées au VIH s'appuient sur un langage sensationnel et reproduisent les stéréotypes négatifs des personnes vivant avec le VIH. Cet article contribue à la recherche sur la justice sociale dans ce domaine en allant au-delà des études du contenu des nouvelles pour découvrir comment les reportages sur la criminalisation du VIH sont produits en premier lieu. Grâce à des entretiens ethnographiques institutionnels avec des journalistes qui produisent des reportages sur la criminalisation du VIH, cette étude met en évidence que les conditions du journalisme de convergence rendent extrêmement difficile pour les reporters de perturber le genre de reportages sur la criminalisation du VIH dans lequel prolifèrent les discours stigmatisants.

This study examines the production of Canadian news media stories about HIV criminalization. In particular, this institutional ethnography (IE) illuminates how the conditions of online convergence journalism position reporters to rely on digital police press releases as sources of news stories. In so doing, this paper adds to critiques that social scientists and activists have raised about the sensational and stigmatizing way that HIV criminalization is portrayed in the mainstream press (African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario, 2013; Mykhalovskiy et al., 2020) and extends sociological understandings of news media and the social organization of knowledge about criminal law and public health.

Broadly, most Canadian studies of news media are content analyses that focus on the narrative patterns and discursive frames of news coverage (DeCillia and McCurdy, 2020; Stoddart and Smith, 2016). This trend holds true for international social science research that examines news coverage of HIV criminalization. Researchers have yet to empirically examine how journalists produce news content about HIV criminalization. This study responds to that gap by investigating how the social world of digital news reporting is put together. I ask: What work activities do reporters carry out to produce a news story about HIV criminalization? How does reporters' work intersect with the work that others do in other institutional settings, such as the criminal legal system? And what openings are there for advocates and activists to disrupt the circulation of stigmatizing discourse in the mainstream press?

I begin by reviewing relevant literature on HIV criminalization, digital news production and the reproduction of ideological perspectives in mainstream news. Second, I describe how I apply an institutional ethnographic approach in this study. Third, I introduce segments of interviews with digital news reporters and a police communications official that illuminate how their work activities are coordinated to produce news reports of HIV criminalization. I argue that the social organization of reporters' writing for digital news creates conditions that make it challenging for journalists to disrupt longstanding patterns of sensational reporting about HIV criminalization. I end by discussing the implications that this coordination of newswork and police work has on public knowledge of HIV criminalization, and public understandings of risk and public safety more broadly.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HIV criminalization and the mainstream press

HIV criminalization is a global HIV activist concern. Broadly, HIV criminalization refers to the use of the criminal law to charge and/or prosecute people living with HIV who, allegedly, have exposed their sex partners to HIV, failed to disclose their HIV-positive status, or transmit HIV sexually (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2019).[1] HIV criminalization is an urgent and vexing social justice issue because it is well established that criminalizing HIV non-disclosure is contrary to human rights and public health principles and does not effectively reduce HIV transmission (The Lancet HIV, 2018). In many jurisdictions (including Canada) criminal legal responses to HIV have been widely criticized for being overly broad, in that people have been prosecuted for sexual acts that carry no risk of HIV transmission, in instances where actual HIV transmission did not occur, and where the risk of transmission was very low (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2019; Hoppe, 2018; The Lancet HIV, 2018). There is also evidence that the criminal law in Canada is increasingly used against people living with HIV who are marginalized by structural conditions, particularly Indigenous women, Black men, and gay men (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2019).

A long line of critical discourse analyses conducted in numerous jurisdictions (including Australia, Canada, and the United States) confirm that news reports of HIV criminal cases rely on sensational language, reproduce negative stereotypes of people living with HIV and exaggerate the risks of HIV transmission (Patton, 2005). It has also been shown that stigmatizing news stories about HIV criminalization have long-term negative repercussions for people living with HIV, as being eternally "googleable" in news stories about their criminal charges renders them vulnerable to harassment and discrimination, and has posed major obstacles when trying to meet fundamental needs, such as securing employment or renting a home (McClelland, 2019).

Patterns in news coverage of HIV criminalization reflect trends in crime reporting more broadly. News coverage of HIV criminalization have been shown to be particularly sensational and stigmatizing when criminal cases related to HIV non-disclosure involve Indigenous people and Black people, especially those who have recently arrived in jurisdictions as migrants or refugees (African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario, 2013; Hoppe, 2018; Mykhalovskiy et al., 2020). A better understanding of how problematic news stories about HIV criminalization are produced can support activists' ongoing efforts to effectively challenge and transform how this issue is presented to the public (HIV Legal Network, 2020).

Digital news and convergence journalism

The overlapping challenges of producing news online are well established. Researchers have noted that news organizations currently contend with audience fragmentation, falling print circulation, the decline of the advertising model, dismal online advertising profits and shrinking subscription revenues (Saridou, Lia-Paschalia, and Veglis, 2017; Usher, 2018). Journalism scholars often use the term "convergence journalism" to describe how news organizations have restructured their newsrooms in the digital era in order to be more efficient, reduce operating costs, and improve their bottom line (Hamilton and Heflin, 2011; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009; Zhang, 2012). In short, convergence journalism can be understood as a management strategy for "producing more content with less news people" (Deuze, 2003, p. 213).

The commercial imperatives of convergence journalism have been shown to shape reporters' newswork practices. The economics of online news have intensified the expectation for reporters to aggressively and continuously pursue, retain, and predict audiences' attention (Ananny and Finn, 2020). Journalists and journalism scholars alike have expressed serious concerns about how digital news production practices that are geared toward rapidly producing widely-read articles favor the publication of simple, uncontentious, and easy to obtain news stories, as opposed to long-form, nuanced, and more expensive journalistic endeavors (Christin, 2020; Saridou et al., 2017).

This article extends studies that are wary about news reporting that occurs within the social relations of convergence journalism by showing how reporters' writing for digital news shapes public knowledge of a particular social issue—HIV criminalization. In so doing, it prompts critical questions about the broader social implications of digital news production processes.

News sources and the reproduction of dominant ideologies

This study adds to a line of critical media scholarship that relates to news as a complex social process. As Stuart Hall and colleagues write, "the media do not simply and transparently report events which are 'naturally' newsworthy in themselves," instead, the process of "making an event intelligible" is constituted by specific journalistic practices, which embody crucial assumptions about what society is and how it works (Hall et al., 1978, p.53, 55). A defining characteristic of the journalistic process is that reporters are seldom positioned to witness events firsthand, and thus rely on the accounts of others to describe these occurrences (Sigal, 1986, p.15). Most often, reporters turn to "official," "authoritative" sources who reliably provide information to reporters on a regular and timely basis. It has been widely noted that while journalists' relationships to official sources enable them to satisfy the professional demand to produce quick, "impartial," and "objective news content" (Bennett, 1990; Gans, 1979; Hall et al., 1978; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978) they also "produce a systematically structured over-accessing to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions" (Hall et al., 1978, p.58). What this means, is that news tends to reproduce status quo definitions of social reality that reporters' "accredited sources" provide.

Media scholars Shoemaker and Reese (2014) have posed the question of how the relationship between media and power plays out in actual practice. Their approach rests on the notion of ideology as a set of dominant ideas. For example, they evoke the theoretical concept of "journalistic occupational ideology" to examine how hegemony is at work in the seemingly "natural," taken-for-granted routines journalists engage in to gather, write, and transmit news (p.84). Ideology is a concept that is used in IE as well, in a way that compliments Shoemaker and Reese's emphasis on routine work practices. A unique contribution of IE research is that it examines ideology as text mediated forms of discourse that coordinate people's activities in line with standardized, objectified discourse (Smith, 2005). In the present study, this means observing how reporters' use of police texts as sources hooks their work up to the police's conception of crime, public safety, and risk. Such an analytic approach can offer insight into how the reproduction of stigmatizing discourse occurs in practice, with a view to supporting ongoing community-based efforts to insert counter-discourses about HIV criminalization into the press.

METHOD

Institutional ethnography and the study of social relations

This paper is based on fieldwork that I conducted as part of a broader inquiry into the production of public knowledge about HIV criminalization. The study received research ethics approval from York University. As is common for IE, this paper is primarily based on interviews ($n = 21$) with research participants about their work practices (Devault, 2006). I interviewed twenty journalists and one police communications representative. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Interviews were typically 45 minutes to an hour in length. To protect the anonymity of participants, I refer to them by pseudonyms and have altered the names of news organizations, publications, headlines, and details of news stories that they named during interviews. I used NVivo software to organize interview transcripts but did not use discrete coding categories to analyze data. Instead, I followed an institutional ethnographic approach to interviews and text analysis developed by Canadian feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith (2002).

Institutional ethnographic interviews are not standardized and are perhaps best described as "talking with people" as part of a "fully reflexive process in which both the participant and the interviewer construct knowledge together" (Devault and McCoy, 2004, p.24). The most distinctive feature of interviews in institutional ethnographic research is that they focus on the work that people do. I related to interviews as a way to learn about what people's everyday activities consist of, how they know how to carry out those activities, and how that work is hooked up to broader ruling relations. This meant starting interviews by asking journalists to broadly describe a "typical workday," or prompting a reporter to "take me through how you and your colleagues crafted a particular news report about HIV criminalization."

IE studies of social relations do not collect data that can be used to test or produce a theory that explains the behavior of research subjects or describes the local organization of people's lives. Instead, institutional ethnographers relate to interview transcripts as windows into how people's everyday work practices are hooked into activities that others are doing elsewhere (Devault, 2006; Luken and Vaughan, 2006). In order to produce analytic descriptions of social relations, researchers read interview transcripts for social organization, seeking to uncover how people's activities are coordinated translocally. The analytic practice of reading for social organization rests on the assumption that social organization is built into people's way of speaking: that we can "find in their talk particular moments of participation in social relations that hook their local experience to the work of others elsewhere, known, and unknown" (Smith, 2002, p. 31). For example, in the present study this meant closely examining moments in reporters' accounts of their newswork where they described how they used a text (such as a police report) that arrived at their work site from elsewhere in a way that made it possible for them to produce a news report about HIV criminalization. As an institutional ethnographer, I treat such moments as a bridge that connect the local sites of reporters' everyday activities and translocal, abstracted ruling relations (Weir and Mykhalovskiy, 2010).

## CASE STUDY: DIGITAL NEWS REPORTING ON HIV CRIMINALIZATION IN CANADA

The social relations of convergence journalism

The two texts below (Figures 1 and 2) provide a useful starting point for an institutional ethnographic study of how reporters work with police news releases. Figure 1 is a short news report

Man, 27, charged after failing to tell sexual partners about HIV status

BY NEWS STAFF

POSTED JUN 20, 2017 4:19 PM EST   LAST UPDATED JUN 20, 2017 AT 4:24 PM EST
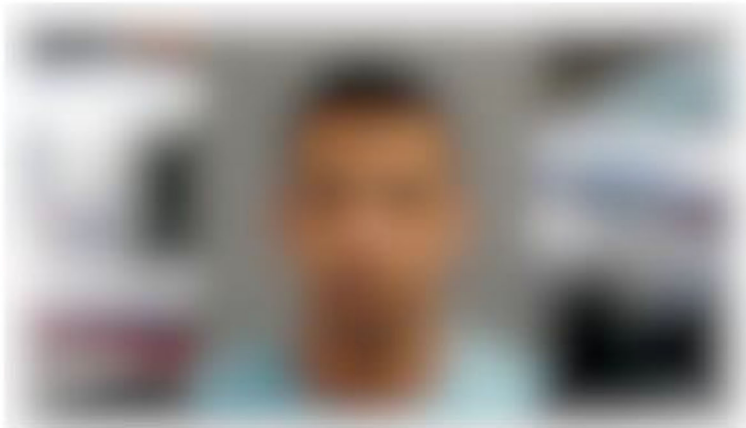
▮▮▮ was arrested and charged with aggravated sexual assault in Toronto on June 19, 2017. Police laid eight additional charges on July 20, 2017. HANDOUT/Toronto Police Service

Police have arrested and charged a 27-year-old Toronto man who allegedly failed to tell his sexual partners he had HIV.

Police said ▮▮▮ was diagnosed with HIV in February 2011 and then proceeded to have sex with at least two men without telling them about his status.

▮▮▮ met one of the men, a 24-year-old, via an online classified ad in July 2011. The other, a 21-year-old, he met on an online dating site last December.

It's alleged ▮▮▮ failed to tell either man about his HIV status, and both contracted the virus.

Police have charged ▮▮▮ with two counts of aggravated sexual assault.

He appeared in court on Monday morning.

FIGURE 1 News article about HIV criminal non-disclosure case [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

published in the days after a man was arrested for allegedly not disclosing his HIV-positive status to sex partners. Figure 2 is a press release that police published to notify the public of the arrest.

A close comparison of Figures 1 and 2 starts to direct attention to ways that reporters rely on texts from police communications departments in order to produce accounts of crime. The significant portions of the police news release text that have been transferred into the news article suggest that in this case, the reporter's work to produce the news article consisted mostly of recontextualizing the text that police published as a news article. Reporters I interviewed consistently lamented that
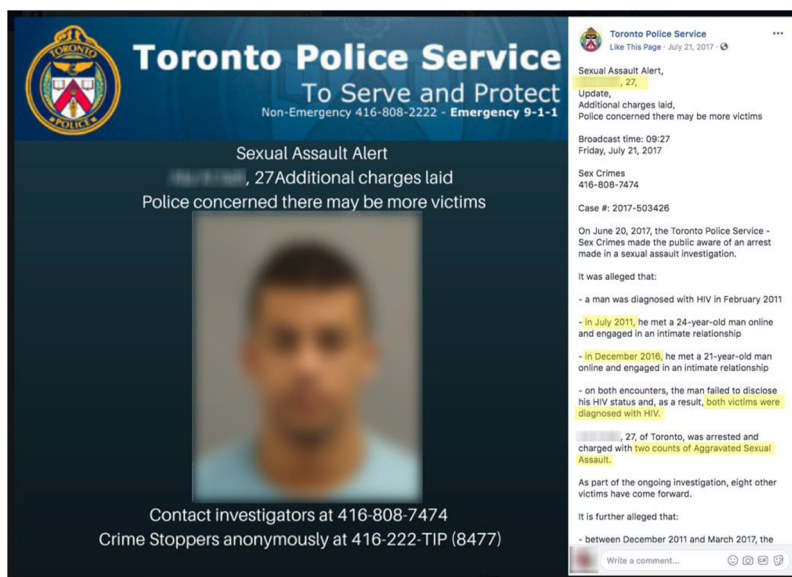
FIGURE 2 Police press release about HIV criminal non-disclosure case [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

the frenetic working conditions of producing digital news impeded deeper, first-hand newswork. For example, a seasoned journalist, Gabe, explained that he witnesses reporters get:

> Sic[ed] to the wolves everyday…because they're young and inexperienced, you know, they're eager and so we say "go get it," and they have to file [news stories] on two or three platforms…they don't have a lot of time to…really understand something and you know, you're only jumping in on the story for a day or two because the resources aren't there.

Gabe's account starts to make visible how reporters' work is structured by news organizations' demand for a constant flow of content that can be distributed across multiple news platforms. Other journalists I spoke with recounted strategies for organizing their workday to keep up with the unrelenting pace of online news. A reporter named Alex explained that he considers "every hour as a deadline…so sometimes I'm like, ugh, this story could have been so much better had I had time to go through everything." When every hour of one's workday represents a deadline for submitting fresh, publishable news content, recontextualizing ready-made source texts is an effective strategy for producing fast and efficient journalism. For example, a web editor named Sarah explained that

> a large portion of my day was just pulling news from news wires…And then when I did deal with original content it was editing that content for the web…not really fact checking because there was no time.

Sarah emphasized, her work consisted of "copy and pasting it [news wire content] pretty much."

Sarah's description of copy and pasting is significant because she pinpoints one of the ways that the mainstream press reinforces dominant power relations. When reporters' work to identify news sources is limited to a desktop activity, their newswork is often narrowed to relying on authoritative sources that have privileged access to the press (Fishman, 1999; Gans, 1979; van Dijk, 1988). For example, since the analog era, police public relations departments have been adept at ensuring that their texts flow into reporters' work settings (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1989; Reeves and Packer, 2013). As the continuous cycle of digital news production has intensified the scope and pace of reporters' work, journalists have come to rely extensively on such digital public relations texts as sources of news (Davies, 2009; Winters et al., 2019).

For example, a journalist named Allen explained that his newswork process often begins by scanning police press releases to identify relevant stories:

> With the police, I just usually do the stuff they send out, they send a daily update of what's happening on their side, the police side, and usually I take a look at that and re-write those.

Reporters acknowledge that news articles that rest heavily on police texts are an unfortunate, but inevitable part of newswork in contemporary newsrooms. As a reporter named Leah described:

> you'll see arrest stories that are really straightforward, just written from press releases, those kinds of stories are really easy to do. In an ideal world, you would never just write from a press release and let it stop there, you would always want to go out and talk to people in community and talk to people involved, you would want to have context and all that stuff, but the reality is that doesn't always happen.

What these reporters' accounts show is that the working conditions of online news limit reporters' capacities to produce news stories with contextual depth or that incorporate diverse voices and perspectives beyond the police texts that consistently flow into their email inboxes and Twitter feeds. Leah explained that as a journalist, she would prefer to dig deeper than police news releases as sources for news stories, but digital news organizations' demand for constant news content sets up reporters to engage in work practices that will produce news articles as quickly as possible. As she described:

> … it's someone's job to write those quick [crime] stories and get them out there. Often those people writing those stories are young and inexperienced or just may not have thought of it. Like I just think about when I started doing this, I didn't know all of the stuff that I know now. Now when I'm reporting on something I'll go, okay I remember this case, I know the history of this, so I can put something into context or I can challenge something and say, no, that's not how that normally happens. All of that stuff, people writing those stories probably haven't thought about, what are the ramifications of this story? What has the Supreme Court said about this? How does this all fit together?… It's like content generation.

In this passage, Leah is speaking to a set of working conditions that create these types of writing challenges. These working conditions are defined by relentless pressure to produce content that can be spread widely across multiple formats (online news, social media, print media, TV, and

radio broadcasts) as rapidly as possible. Journalists often carry out this newswork with limited opportunities or resources to conduct in-depth, nuanced reporting. Instead, their newswork is commonly a desktop activity that is premised on identifying and repurposing digital sources of news (such official press releases, public relations materials, and social media content).

As Leah describes, while reporters' work to "write those quick stories and get them out there" meets an institutional demand for a consistent stream of news content that will attract online news consumers, challenges can arise when hurried generalist reporters report on complex criminal legal issues: important historical and legal contexts fall away, and reporters end up relying on texts that police produce to generate news content. As I interviewed reporters who work with police news releases to produce news stories about HIV criminalization, I started to recognize ways that journalists' newswork is hooked into a broad complex of social relations that extends beyond the newsroom.

Police knowledge and reasoning in the news

My interview with a reporter, who I will refer to as Laura, brought into view particular ways that forms of police knowledge are pulled into journalists' writing. Laura provided a detailed account of the steps that she took to produce a news article about a man who faced criminal charges related to allegedly not disclosing his HIV-positive status to sex partners:

I got an email from Police, it was a press release. I get emails for every press release they send out. I read it, HIV non-disclosure incident in downtown core. We usually write about things that happen in the downtown core, I forwarded it to my editor and said "do you want to write about this? We wrote about this person back in 2014 or 2015 when the first charges were brought forward." My editor got back to me and said, "yes do a follow up." It's always responsible for us to do a follow up on stories to keep updated. After that I wanted to get more information from Police so I called them…whoever was on shift at the Police wasn't answering me… It wasn't like I really needed to talk to anyone because they issued a press release, I called them a few times and they didn't get back to me, so I just wrote it up. Pretty much re-worded the press release to make it coherent, straightforward…yeah you upload the photo that…also goes in the press release, and then we just send it off to the online editors and the editor, the senior editor, whoever is on during that shift, for them to read it over, and then it goes online, that's pretty much it.

This quote offers a glimpse into the everyday activities of a breaking news reporter and makes visible some of the ways that writing for digital news is coordinated with policing work. First, the police's account of the event makes it possible for the reporter to produce a news article that is structured as a standard crime story. The article that Laura wrote features a mug-shot style photo of the person accused of a crime, and much like the example in Figures 1 and 2, relies heavily on details included in the police news release including the approximate geographic area in which police allege the crime was committed, the approximate date at which police allege it took place, and details regarding the next steps in the criminal-legal processing of this case. The reporter is made aware of this case through a police news release and the content and form of the police text shapes her understanding of the event as a type of crime.

A second important aspect of Laura's account of her newswork is that it begins to show that police texts enter into reporters' newswork practices in a much more complex way than acting simply as sources of information. Rather, Laura's description of her work with the police text provides a way to understand police news releases as coordinators of inter-professional relations in

which journalists incorporate and circulate the police's understanding of concepts such as public safety and crime in their newswork.

The police published the news release as part of an effort to build a case against the individual they had charged, however, Laura repurposes the document by extracting aspects of the text and fitting them into her newswork routines. As she imports the police news release into her professional setting she strategically selects and endorses parts of the text that fit journalists' professional perspective (Linell, 1998; Solin, 2004). For example, she related the police text to news articles that her news organization has published about this individual in the past and connected segments of the police text to journalistic standards of the "public interest."

Laura's work activities to recontextualize the police document as a news story illustrate how the discourse of particular categories of professionals blend together when communicative content is handled across professions (Linell, 1998). Laura's actions exemplify how reporters' activities discursively facilitate the relations of police, by making it possible for police texts to cross professional boundaries, coordinate crime reporting, and to appear in multiple local sites at which news articles circulate online.

This understanding of how police accounts of crime, risk, and security come to circulate widely in news discourse was made clearer by an interview with a representative of a police communications department.

The Construction of Public Safety and Newsworthiness

Reading interview transcripts for social organization shows that reporters' work with police press releases not only recontextualizes the police's account of an event as news, it also recontextualizes police knowledge and forms of reasoning that construct people as criminal subjects. This was clarified during an interview I conducted with someone who works in police communications, who I will call David. Consider David's explanation of the criteria that his department follows for producing a news release:

> Well there has to be a reason... if it's a threat to public safety it goes out right away, even if it's the middle of the night. Because we have an obligation, if there's a threat to public safety to get that information out as quickly as we can.

Here, the speaker identifies the notion of public safety as a key factor in the police's decision to publish a press release. David's remarks show that police news releases do more than simply organize facts about a crime into a standard template (this crime, occurred at this time, at this place), police news releases also work to produce the person named in the text as a public safety threat. This construction of a person as a public safety threat is accomplished in news releases by pairing one's name, photo, personal information and descriptions of criminal charges they face, with language that underscores the danger that one poses. For example, the text of the news release in Figure 2 emphasizes that "police are concerned there may be more victims." This sort of language not only constructs the person facing charges as a threatening figure, it also acts as a signal to reporters who are sifting through various digital news releases throughout their workday, that this particular item is newsworthy. For example, a breaking news reporter named Jessica described how she identifies a newsworthy story:

> I think you develop a pretty good intuition for it through the years. But police will also put out press releases, for example, if they're looking for someone involved in a crime…they might say very clearly that there is a huge public safety element…Language like that is a really good indicator for us.

Jessica's assessment of newsworthiness in this segment is coordinated by the language that police employ to produce an individual as a public safety threat. Her work as a reporter is connected to the work of police as she takes up and circulates descriptions of individuals that police construct as threatening figures. Other reporters echoed that the conditions of online convergence journalism position them to closely connect their work to police knowledge and reasoning. For example, one experienced journalist I spoke with, named Kate, described that when she first started working in a newsroom as an intern years ago, her

> job was to create a constant flow of copy for the website…like just little cop reads. Those were heavily reliant on press releases from the cops…they're 200 words long, not a lot of room for nuance or context at all…HIV non-disclosure was always covered as a crime if the police think it's a crime…the cops say this is a crime, and you say oh god this is a crime, crime is bad, this person is a bad person.

Given the pace of online, digital news production that reporters described in the first section of this article, one can imagine that it would be exceedingly challenging for reporters to produce nuanced and complex accounts of crime. Reporters grappled with how to square their understandings of the principles of journalism with the consistent organizational demand for news content that will be read and shared widely online. For example, a veteran reporter named Lisa explained:

> we're constantly being told with our online stories which ones are the most popular. But also… you can write two headlines for your story, and the [software] system will push them out there and then you can see which headline is attracting more clicks so that at a certain point you can just bail on the more boring headline and go to the salacious headline that's working better… I think it's the whole idea of news judgement. Are you trying to shape or broaden or strengthen democracy or just sell people something?

> That's the worry I guess.

Lisa's account suggests how commercialization contributes to newswork that produces and reproduces the standard genre of sensational crime stories about HIV criminalization. Headlines understood to be "working better" are those that draw the highest volume of readers to the story, often, as Lisa suggests, by being shocking or provocative in tone. In the case of HIV and the criminal law, headlines that alert readers to obectified, dangerous, and threatening, outsiders are more likely to grab the readers' attention, than those that treat the issue as a complex and nuanced public health and human rights issue.

There are ample reasons for HIV non-disclosure to be covered in the news as a complex social, public health, and human rights issue. However, journalists' accounts surface how police press releases function to cement a connection between HIV non-disclosure, criminality, and moral culpability in the press. The implications of this type of coordination of police communications

work with newswork become weightier as one considers that police understand news releases as powerful policing instruments that can be used to surveil, monitor, and regulate those they deem to be criminals. David recounted:

> We now see regularly criminals surrendering shortly after we put their pictures up. And if you think about, our main account we reach thousands of people, but if a news organization with 1.75 million retweets, it means everyone in the city is going to get it. And I would love to be there when someone sees their face come up on their phone. Our record in homicides is one hour, we had a man whose lawyer said don't do anything until police start looking for you. We put his picture out and three hours later he's at the front counter saying "I'm your guy." That's amazing, I never thought that would happen and that's the most satisfying, out of all the stuff that we do, that's the most satisfying because no one expects us to be able to get a homicide investigation to surrender, and these things are very expensive and very time consuming.

As the speaker describes how police press releases can latch onto the digital platforms that media organizations use to disseminate news, he locates online news as an instrument that can extend the work of police. For David, news releases are a device that can work to compel those whom police construct as criminals to surrender to police custody. In this sense, news releases seem to be more than documents that publicize the facts of a case, they are understood by police as an instrument of cost-effective and time-efficient policing. Thus, when reporters rely on police news releases, and structure their newswork upon these texts, their activities reproduce forms of ruling that shape the experiences of those who are criminalized. So long as reporters' work reproduces modes of police power and surveillance that people who are criminalized already face, it will be exceedingly challenging for reporters to disrupt longstanding patterns of HIV stigma in the press.

Consider Jessica's account of her newswork to produce a news story about a man facing criminal charges for allegedly not disclosing his HIV-positive status to sex partners:

> So, this is written straight from a press release… there are issues of stigma for using photos of people with HIV, but this guy has sexually assaulted, allegedly, a number of people so I feel like public safety outweighs his personal privacy at this point… there had been a lot of victims so if people didn't know his name when they had relations with him they might be helped by a photo.

The reporter's comments show how the criteria of public safety set out by police structure her perspective on HIV criminalization and writing for digital news about this issue. In this case, the name, photo, and HIV serostatus of this individual were disseminated in the mainstream press because the reporter wrote the story "straight from a press release." Furthermore, her understanding of the case's newsworthiness is coordinated by policing concepts such as "public safety" and motivated in part by an effort to enhance the public surveillance of this individual with a view to encouraging people to come forward and lay additional criminal charges.

There are several approaches available to critical sociologists invested in better understanding how Jessica's newswork is connected to the power of police. For example, one could draw on her account to extend analyses of how newswork is structured ideologically. This line of inquiry often attends to journalists' opinions, perspectives, or news judgement. In this case, one might relate to Jessica's writing "straight from a press release" as an example of how reporters choose to

"index" "legitimate voices in the news according to the range of views expressed by prominent officials" (Bennett, 1990) or emblematic of how the professional values of journalists must be consistent with those officials they rely on as their primary source of information (Hallin, 1986, p.69; Shoemaker and Reese, 2014, p.10).

An IE study of how power relations are embedded in reporters' newswork with police texts takes a different approach. As per Dorothy Smith (2005), ideology is "no longer treated as if [it is] essentially inside people's heads," but rather, becomes observable insofar as it is produced in people's actual doings (25). In this case, a focus on how reporters' work is mediated by police texts displaces an emphasis on the meaning that reporters ascribe to their newswork or to a news event, and brings into critical consciousness how newswork is hooked into work happening in police communication departments. Understanding news content as the product of inter-institutional coordination invites critical questions about the social relations that shape how news readers come to know about HIV non-disclosure as a type of crime, and about risk and public safety more broadly. The hope is that highlighting the coordination of newswork and police work can also start to provide the basis for structural change that aims to untangle the press and the police (Smith, 2002, p.38).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Recent studies of news production reframe the press' traditional structure of news gathering as a sociotechnical assemblage (Ananny and Finn, 2020). They argue that the news content that "digital first" organizations produce is determined less by individual reporters' relationships to particular sources, and as van Dijk and colleagues write, "more by the interaction between the assemblage of news organizations, data services, and advertising networks that populate the contemporary news landscape" (van Dijk, Poell, and de Wall, 2018, p.58). Ananny and Finn emphasize that assemblages of human and nonhuman actors—including data from other organizations—shape how online news is defined, produced, and circulated.

The notion of online news as an assemblage is useful for directing analytic attention to the tremendous array of actors and technologies that collide to create the conditions under which digital news content is produced (Ananny and Finn, 2020). Here, I want to extend studies of digital news assemblages by calling attention to how reporters' newswork is shaped in significant ways by digital data that police organizations produce and circulate.

It is well established that police have been influential "knowledge brokers" since the analog era. For example, sociologist Richard Ericson's (1994) study of policing practices called attention to how police produce and distribute knowledge for the risk management activities of security operatives in other institutions. Conceptualizing the police merely as "knowledge brokers," however, risks overwriting the myriad ways that police enact violence, especially upon communities of Indigenous people, Black people, People of Colour, women, migrants, trans communities, people without access to housing, people who use drugs, and people who sell sex. Nevertheless, recognizing that the production and circulation of risk knowledge across institutional boundaries is a primary police activity points to a significant way that police maintain and expand their influence.

The seemingly banal work that police do to distribute risk information by filling out forms or publishing press releases is important to take seriously. As the range of institutions that depend on the information that police distribute expands, police activity ceases to be fixed to a particular territorial space, and police are able to move through disparate settings as security experts (Ericson, 1994). Social scientists and activists refer to this sort of expansion of police functions into new

settings as the police "mission creep" or "mission drift" (Wood, 2014). For example, observers have expressed concerns about how police now address "security concerns" in expansive settings such as schools (Monahan and Torres, 2010) public transportation systems (Cote-Lussier, 2012), mental health care, public housing and public parks (Camp, Jordan, and Heatherton, 2016).

The present study shows that the conditions of digital news production position reporters to rely on police communication materials and transpose significant sections of police texts as news texts. For example, the accounts of reporters I spoke with illuminate that reporters (or news editors) will produce a headline for the article, add a caption to the police's mugshot, and assemble the bullet-point details from the police text into a narrative about what police have said and done. As an IE, this study relates to such text-mediated work activities as practices that coordinate what people are doing in newsrooms with the work that police are doing in public relations departments. These newswork practices operate ideologically by translating police knowledge and reasoning into familiar forms of news, and in so doing construct particular ways of seeing the social world (Ananny and Finn, 2020). In the context of news about HIV criminalization, reporters' reliance on readily available digital police texts is likely to produce messages that equate HIV serostatus with notions of dangerous criminality, and as a long line of critical discourse analyses confirm, these messages often reproduce harmful gendered and racialized tropes. More broadly, reporters' work with police communication texts makes the press an avenue for police to distribute information to a wide audience of news readers. The sociotechnical assemblage of digital news becomes a site of police mission creep.

The newswork practices that are visible in this study amplify the ruling relations of police because they make it possible for the police's constructions of public safety to appear in multiple local sites at a given time. In this context, the police do not simply act as expert knowledge brokers in connection to the sort of professional settings that Ericson describes (such as insurance companies, social security agencies, and regulatory agencies)—instead, digital news media deliver ideological police messages about risk and security to the everyday worlds of those who read, click on, scroll through, share, and tweet news stories.

When considering the consequences attached to social relations that propel police knowledge and conceptions of risk and safety in the mainstream press, it is crucial to underline that state actors, such as police, protect some at the expense of others and work to maintain inequitable social, racial, and economic divisions (Maynard, 2017). Over the past years, calls to #DefundThe-Police have gained momentum. A focal point of calls to defund the police have justifiably been on the demilitarization of police forces. As organized movements contest the tools of physical police violence, it is important that the tools of symbolic police violence do not go unchallenged. Police communication infrastructures represent an important site of critique and divestment. Recently, calls to "defund the crime beat" have grown louder. As Tauhid Chappell and Mike Rispoli write, "while crime coverage fails to serve the public, it does serve three powerful constituencies: white supremacy, law enforcement, and newsrooms – specifically a newsrooms's bottom line" (Chappell and Rispoli, 2020). This study adds to a lineage of research that highlights the negative consequences of crime coverage (Beale, 2006; Chappell and Rispoli, 2020; Dixon, 2018; Gramlick, 2016). The accounts in this IE study illustrate how reporters' reliance on police texts profoundly shape mainstream narratives that construct certain people as threats to public health and safety, and in the case of HIV criminalization in particular, instruct readers to relate to people living with HIV as safety risks in need of regulation and control. This type of discourse amplifies HIV stigma and helps to propel the criminalization of HIV that has shown to be out of step with public health and human rights principles.

While writing with calls to defund the crime beat in mind, it is important to underline that news coverage of HIV criminalization is not univocal. In newsrooms, some reporters I interviewed pushed back against the standard practice of relying on police as sources of news and, as one reporter described, "telling stories as police seem them, as they want you to tell them". Shawn, for example, problematized the way that leaning on police communication officials disrupts and restricts his journalistic voice:

> most of the media will just go straight to the [police] spokesperson but that makes me a little uneasy because basically the spokesperson gets to do my job where they ask the questions they think are most relevant to the lead investigator. They compress them into a set of talking points that I'm sure have been vetted up and down... this means you usually get this terse, cop speak.

Outside of newsrooms, as I describe elsewhere, HIV activists have worked tirelessly to intervene on reporters' newswork practices and re-shape how HIV criminalization is written about in the press. Thanks to the sustained media relations work of people living with HIV, HIV activists, and community-based HIV advocacy organizations, it is now not uncommon for news articles to foreground the lived experiences and perspectives of people living with HIV who have faced criminal charges, emphasize the stigmatizing quality of HIV criminalization, and highlight scientific advancements that reduce the likelihood of HIV transmission, such as PrEP.[2]

CONCLUSION

Since the days of analog news production, reporters have relied on police as a key source of information. Meanwhile, from the very beginning, public knowledge of HIV has been shaped by inaccurate, sensational and stigmatizing media coverage. That is to say, the social relations that I highlight in this paper are not necessarily new. There exists no golden age of journalism to harken back to that is free of damaging stereotypes, tropes, and hegemonic views of the world.

While digital convergence journalism does not explain the long history of stigmatizing representations of HIV and other issues in the news, this study shows that the social relations of convergence journalism make it exceedingly difficult for reporters to undo this long lineage of problematic news coverage.

Reporters' descriptions of their everyday newswork help to illustrate that the frenetic conditions of online news production position them to rely on ready-made sources of digital news, such as police press releases. When reporters' writing for digital news consists of selecting parts of police news releases and recontextualizing the text as news stories, they meet an institutional demand for news content that will consistently attract the attention of online audiences. At the same time, this type of newswork makes it likely that longstanding patterns of sensational, stigmatizing news will persist.

Reporters' reliance on police press releases accelerates the flow of police information and reasoning into the mainstream press and cements discursive connections between HIV serostatus, criminality, risk, and moral culpability. The prospect of the digital news assemblage as a site of police mission creep is daunting. Of course, an IE study of newswork cannot bring solutions on its own, however, IE is meant to offer a kind of analysis that can help political advocates "to see what they are up against and where they might want to apply pressure" (Devault, 2006, p. 295).

As reporters' accounts in this paper make clear the social relations that condition reporters to process source texts quickly and efficiently into digital news content are deeply entrenched. It is difficult to envision how to meaningfully disrupt such systemic and effective news production routines. What activists can do, however, is work within the existing structures of digital convergence journalism with an understanding that reporters' writing for digital news is primarily an exercise in quickly and efficiently producing and processing texts. Interventions that take on this approach may concentrate on producing texts that can compete with those published by criminal legal authorities that are often most readily available to reporters. This makes it more likely that advocates' voices will be included in news texts that hurried reporters produce. Advocates can also campaign to update and reform journalistic style guides that reporters follow when crafting a story and produce specialized guides for reporting on social justice issues. Such efforts are underway in the context of community-based efforts to resist HIV criminalization, as well as in the decolonization and sexual assault survivor movements (femifesto, 2021; HIV Legal Network, 2020; Reporting in Indigenous Communities, 2021).

At the same time, those concerned with the way that police shape mainstream narratives about public health, risk, and safety can contribute to broader efforts to reorganize the social relations in which reporters work. Such efforts may center on projects to defend journalistic integrity and to resist the structures of digital convergence journalism that reduce reporting to convenient, quick, copy and paste style text processing. This might involve investing in news organizations and alternative presses that practice slower, long-form journalism, or for community-based organizations to expand their efforts to produce their own messaging through independent publishing, social media campaigns, or in-person community forums.

A significant limitation of this paper that impedes its generalizability has to do with highly restricted access to interviewing and observing the activities of police communications officials. Despite sustained effort over many months, I was only able to secure a single interview with a police communications official. This project would have benefited from a deeper empirical account of how police communications departments do their work. Future studies would do well to develop an empirical understanding of how a police officer decides to bring a particular case to a communications department, the ways that communications departments make decision about what cases to publish news releases about, and what it looks like when communications departments field questions from reporters. Such insights would broaden understandings of how police shape public knowledge and define public safety and offer a guide for advocates looking to intervene upon the coordination of newswork and police work.

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NOTES

[1] In Canada, people living with HIV have a legal requirement to disclose one's HIV positive status before having sex that poses a "realistic possibility" of HIV transmission (R. v. Mabior, 2012, SCC 47 and R. v. D.C, 2012 SCC 48).

[2] The Canadian AIDS Treatment and Information Exchange (CATIE) describes Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) as "a medication that a person who is HIV-negative can take to reduce their risk of getting HIV. When PrEP

is used as prescribed it is rare to get HIV through sex, and the chance of getting HIV from sharing drug using equipment is dramatically reduced"(CATIE n.d.).

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