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Mortality, moral regulation, and (im)moral entrepreneurship in *My Favorite Murder*

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ABSTRACT

As mediated death has become a staple of contemporary society, debates about the treatment of death in the public domain abound. This article examines the true crime comedy podcast *My Favorite Murder*, arguing that it functions to produce a collaboratively ‘provocative morbid space’ in which its hosts and audiences can engage in contemplating, discussing, and negotiating the politics of murder, victimhood, and their surrounding inequalities. *My Favorite Murder* explicitly positions itself as provocative and morally ambiguous, raising questions about who has ownership, legitimacy, and moral standing when it comes to discussing death. We argue that the podcast both reflects public fascination with death and functions to enact a socially progressive agenda through controversial and entertaining popular cultural engagement with the sensitive subject of murder. With the hosts acting as what we term ‘(im)moral entrepreneurs’ collaboratively producing with audiences ‘counter cultural (im)moral discourses’, the commercially successful podcast offers a version of the ‘cautionary tale’ that foregrounds the sociocultural inequalities that have contributed to the vast array of murders discussed across its 300+ existing episodes.

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Introduction

‘Stay sexy and don’t get murdered’; ‘Fuck politeness, apologize later’¹; ‘You’re in a cult, call your dad’. These are recurring phrases in the true crime comedy podcast *My Favorite Murder*. They immediately function – like the podcast’s title, with its uncomfortable juxtaposition of ‘favourite’ and ‘murder’ – to situate the show as provocative and controversial. They signal its relevance to questions of morality and appropriateness and its engagement with gender politics and sociocultural inequalities pertaining to murder and victimhood. The branding of the series features the words *My Favourite Murder* in a mixture of upper- and lower-case lettering in different fonts and colours, as if cut from newspapers and magazines and collaged together. The aesthetic echoes that of a ‘poison pen’ letter, most likely familiar to audiences via numerous visual narratives that adopt it in stories about serial killers

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and stalkers. This branding makes clear the podcast's intentional and ongoing dialogue with the mediatization of murder, and with the place of violent death in popular culture.

My Favorite Murder has been commercially successful. Reported to have 25 million downloads per month, in 2019 it ranked number two in the inaugural Forbes ranking of top-earning podcasters, second only to Joe Rogan (Shapiro 2020). Evidence of its predominantly female and highly engaged, dedicated fan base, who refer to themselves as 'Murderinos', is visible across the internet. For example, on an Instagram account dedicated to sharing images of *My Favorite Murder* themed tattoos. The format of the podcast has varied over the 300+ episodes, but typically revolves around one of its hosts, Karen Kilgariff or Georgia Hardstark, relaying the story of a real-life murder. Episodes features famous murders, less prominent murders, and various violent crimes, as well as 'hometown stories', wherein Murderinos submit tales of murders that took place where they grew up. As one of the hosts retells a story, it 'is typically punctuated by groans of horror, gasps, laughs, and incredulous questions on the part of the other' (Fitzpatrick 2017). The duo's book *Stay Sexy and Don't Get Murdered* (2019) was a *New York Times* bestseller (Shapiro 2020), and the hosts have expanded to both a successful live show and the development of their own podcast network.

Gibson (2007, 416) has argued that death can function in a mediated environment as a 'narrative force and image system used to inform, shock and entertain'. *My Favorite Murder* demonstrates this triple function at work in popular culture, easily described as informative, shocking, and entertaining. Yet whilst death is often understood to fall into two categories in terms of its media representation – 'fictional' or 'real' (Gibson 2007, 417), *My Favorite Murder* also functions to complicate these reductive categories. The distinction between 'fictional' and 'real' is often signalled by factors including aesthetic presentation, style, and genre, and is through these that audiences can come 'to understand the linguistic codes and visual signifiers of morality, sincerity, or matter-of-factness' that constitute what is being consumed (Gibson 2007, 417). As this article will argue, *My Favorite Murder* complicates normative moral discourses about death, with its hosts and audiences participating in discussion of what constitutes an appropriate moral response to real-life murder in the context of a comedy podcast.

The podcast has received attention from researchers for its potential capacity to promote wellbeing amongst audiences with mental illness (Pavelko and Gall Myrick 2020), in terms of online fan communities (Schulenberg 2021), in relation to true crime podcast audiences (Boling and Hull 2018), and the ethics of the female voice (Greer 2018). Hoffman and Hobbs (2021) have examined the depiction of female victimhood in the podcast, positioning it as an example of 'Post-Me Too True Crime'. Here we examine *My Favorite Murder* specifically in terms of its engagement with death and murder as sensitive subject matter, paying specific attention to its ability to produce a space in which the hosts and audiences can engage collaboratively in and negotiate ideas about mortality, morality, and sociocultural inequalities as they pertain to murder and victimhood. Penfold-Mounce (2019, 269) has argued that popular culture offers a 'data source for culturally shared narratives about death and the dead often neglected by thanatologists and sociologists'. Seeking to redress this neglect, we examine how *My Favorite Murder* both reflects public fascination with death and functions to enact a socially progressive agenda through explicit and implicit engagement with the morality of discussing murder. We argue that the hosts and their audiences collaboratively

produce what we term counter cultural (im)moral discourses, with the hosts themselves acting as (im)moral entrepreneurs.

***My Favorite Murder* and Collaborative ‘Provocative Morbid Space’ (Penfold-Mounce 2018)**

Sumiala (2022, 40) has argued that ‘death as deeply mediated has the capacity to create new spaces and temporalities of intimacy’. Sumiala (2022, 58) also notes that ‘bad death’ (murder, for example) is ‘more likely to become a public event in hybrid media’ than death that is deemed less remarkable. *My Favorite Murder* is exemplary of deeply mediated engagement with ‘bad death’. This is evident in the breadth of its own cross-platform mediated network – the podcast itself; Facebook and Instagram pages; dedicated website; accompanying book, as well as live experiences. It can also be seen in the explicit and at times critical engagement in episodes with the role of mainstream media in reporting the deaths under discussion. It is further evident in the visual signalling implicit in the podcast branding discussed above, whereby the ‘poison pen’ lettering is reminiscent of the mediated aesthetics of murder in the broader cultural imagination. Sumiala (2022) points out that new media such as podcasts have made the idea of what death news is, and who is allowed to make it, more ambiguous. Its specific focus on death, and on what Sumiala (2022) terms ‘bad death’, also aligns *My Favorite Murder* with the notion of ‘provocative morbid space’, a term coined by Penfold-Mounce (2018).

Penfold-Mounce (2018, 79) has argued that popular culture can function to produce morbid space. Morbid space refers to space that activates a morbid sensibility in audiences, with morbid sensibility referring to ‘people’s willingness to deliberate death in the context of popular culture’ (Penfold-Mounce 2018, 66). Morbid sensibility, when a space accommodates and encourages it, functions as ‘a vehicle for people to respond to [...] death and the dead without concern for being censured or criticized for being overly macabre or morbid’ (Penfold-Mounce 2018, 66). Penfold-Mounce (2018, 74) differentiates between safe and provocative morbid spaces. Safe morbid spaces are characterized by the fictional, by suspended realism, the imaginative and by ‘safety from direct personal consequences’ (Penfold-Mounce 2018, 74). Provocative morbid spaces are more likely to be generated when consumers are urged ‘to consider uncomfortable issues that might be avoided elsewhere’ (Penfold-Mounce 2018, 79). Certainly, *My Favorite Murder* fits this definition in its focus on discussing real-life murder, and on raising questions about the sociocultural politics of murder – primarily in terms of gender, but also in terms of class, race, and other factors. The podcast can also be understood as provocative for a range of other reasons. It has provoked criticism around the hosts’ use of language and discussion of sex workers, people of colour and LGBTQ+ communities.

To some extent, the hosts are open to shifting their approaches to language and to how they frame (or indeed fail to address) certain murders. As Duchemin (2017) explains:

When listeners commented on the use of the word “prostitute,” Kilgariff and Hardstark started to use “sex worker.” When they received sharp feedback about how they wrongly (and flippantly) diagnosed murderers with mental illnesses and personality disorders—lumping psychopaths and sociopaths into the definitely-a-serial-killer pool even though that’s not always true—the pair began carefully constructing their words.

The hosts also run a regular ‘corrections corner’ segment in the show, evidencing their willingness to be responsive to change, and now cite their research sources in episode descriptions and in the audio itself. Their willingness to engage with their audiences collaboratively is reiterated in their book, the introduction to which ends with ‘Let us know if we get anything wrong’ (2019, 23). However, the podcast and its community of fans have continued to face criticism for the provocative tone of the show, for an alleged ‘toxic’ culture of bullying within fan communities (see Riley 2020), for charges of performing ‘white women’s tears’, for praising police in a style described as ‘copaganda’ (Discover Pods 2021), and for a hostile tone towards some criticisms about the show (Duchemin 2017) resonant of scholarship concerning the ‘weak reflexivity’ of white women comics to engage with critiques about racism (Colpean and Tully 2019).

Arguably, true crime as a genre can be especially productive of *collaboratively* provocative morbid space. We define collaboratively provocative morbid spaces as those that encourage deliberation, conversation, discussion, and challenge focused on topics that might be deemed inappropriate or immoral – in the case of *My Favorite Murder*, both between hosts and with/amongst the podcast’s audiences. Kilgariff (in Shapiro 2020) has stated that ‘it’s nice to listen and process terrible [things] together’ as ‘there’s something really cathartic about that,’ emphasizing the way the podcast can produce a shared space, as well as its focus on sensitive subject matter. The hosts have written about the collaborative, participatory relationship they have developed with listeners, and the relationships between sharing and true crime, when they have reflected on the factual errors that listeners point out week on week in their episodes:

if there’s anything we’ve learned in our three years of doing this podcast, it’s that we don’t know anything. [...] Being so consistently wrong made us very self-conscious about our lack of education and our habits of assumption [...] in the beginning, it made us feel like we were doing it wrong. But here’s the irony [...] people still listened. Some even loved it. Our mistakes opened up the conversation we’d been having with each other and gave other people a chance to participate. [...] At first that realisation was intimidating. We’d get emails saying we said the wrong date or left out part of the story or pronounced a city name incorrectly. It felt bad, like we weren’t doing our homework correctly. But the messages were always complimentary and fun. That’s when we realised that the people communicating with us were excited to be filling us in. Because that’s the best part of being into true crime. There’s nothing more engaging than talking to someone about the case and finding out they don’t know a certain aspect of it (Hardstark and Kilgariff 2019, 21).

Here, the hosts acknowledge that the podcast’s success is in part reliant on their not being ‘experts’ and instead on their willingness to engage with audiences to acknowledge their lack of awareness of all the facts and perspectives pertinent to the murders they discuss. The podcast represents popular cultural engagement with death in mediated form, but also represents a collaboratively provocative morbid space in which the hosts and audiences can deliberate about the details of murders that have captured the public imagination, as well as lesser-known deaths.

The podcast is also broadly provocative because of its genre position as a comedy, and because of the overt use of expletives. One listener’s response signals the criticisms that the podcast has received about the potentially immoral, disrespectful, or egregious content of the show. Listener Mark’s email is read out as follows: keep up the good work and don’t ever remove the humour from the podcast. It isn’t being disrespectful, and

you aren't going to hell. We're just coping with this fucked up world in the best way we can (e.5, 41:00–41:15). Though the name suggests this comment comes from a male listener, it has been widely recognized that true crime's primary consumers identify as female (Hoffman and Hobbs 2021; Schulenberg 2021; Boling and Hull 2018; Vicary and Fraley 2010; Cameron and Frazer 1987). Vicary and Fraley (2010, 82) argue that female fans attraction to true crime comes in part from an interest in identifying 'potential survival cues'. In this way, audiences can be understood to engage with the podcast in search of strategies for self-preservation (or what Moore 2009 terms 'cautionary tales', which we will discuss in more detail later in this article). As we will show, it is in its engagement with discourses about morality, murder, and societal inequalities the podcast can best be seen to produce a collaboratively provocative morbid space within popular culture. Within this space, the *My Favorite Murder* hosts can be understood as (im)moral entrepreneurs undertaking moral work, producing counter cultural (im)moral discourses in collaboration with audiences.

Negotiating moral discourses when talking about murder

The ethics and moral legitimacy of telling stories about real-life murders is as fraught as the mediation of death more broadly. As Greer has highlighted, 'telling stories of violence and murder responsibly is a difficult – perhaps impossible – thing to achieve' (Greer 2017, 162). There is inevitably a moral dimension to the re-telling of such stories, with normative moral discourses about what it is and is not appropriate to say coming to the fore. *My Favorite Murder*, we argue, often challenges normative moral discourses. For example, they challenge the idea that it is inappropriate to talk publicly about death, especially in the context of comedy, and to laugh in relation to violent crime. They challenge the moral idea that it is inappropriate to share the stories of others, in particular when this may reify the harm and trauma of violent crime in terms of survivors and of victims' loved ones. They also challenge the notion that it is inappropriate to profit financially in relation to others' suffering. In challenging these moral discourses through their podcast, they can be understood to be engaging in moral work. The concept of moral work originates from a study of women's accounts concerning breastfeeding (Ryan, Bissell, and Alexander 2010) exploring how women are required to engage in such work in order to represent themselves in relation to dominant, normative moral discourses and values. Ryan, Bissell, and Alexander (2010) use the categories of altruism and political action to consider different kinds of moral work. We argue that moral work is evident in relation to *My Favorite Murder*, which gives rise to a set of moral strategies that help audiences to make sense of deaths being represented in the show as framed through different lenses, those of altruism (giving the audience catharsis and actionable learnings from deaths) and political action (bringing women's deaths into the public domain in ways that challenge mainstream media representations). The next section will examine these strategies as kinds of counter cultural (im)moral discourses, considering the moral work of altruism and political action they represent. We define counter cultural (im)moral discourses quite simply as discourses that counter normative moral discourses. Whilst they might be deemed immoral by many, for others they offer valuable altruistic and political perspectives on societal issues relating to death, murder and violent crime. We term them '(im)moral' rather than immoral to account for differing conclusions people can draw as to

what is 'moral' or 'immoral' and to acknowledge the complex and subjective landscape of morality, drawing attention to how practises termed immoral by some can by others be deemed an important and progressive interjection into processes of social change.

Responding to and challenging moral regulation in *My Favorite Murder*: altruism and political action

Dominant media representations of women are problematic. Since the origins of print media 'moral panic' regarding young women has been a staple component (Cohen 2011). Thiel-Stern (2014) argues that historical representations have served to marginalize and limit the cultural and political power of young women who are the subject of these representations. Representation of women who are victims of violent crime are no exception. García-Del Moral (2011) describes how the very depictions of women's deaths in news media are violent in and of themselves, and that the means and ownership of production of these representations is a technology of violence. Using cases of reported murders and disappearances of Aboriginal women in Canada and women in Ciudad Juarez, Moral (2011) shows how women are constructed in these reports as social waste and thereby expecting of their fate as an inevitability, or even as deserved. Dillman (2014, 1) has similarly argued that violent images of women are reflective of a broader sociocultural positioning of women as disposable (Dillman 2014).

My Favorite Murder can be understood to counter such images of disposable, violated female bodies through its aural recounting of violent crime (Greer 2017). According to Greer (2017, 153) the hosts':

female voices transform themselves and the victims (often female) of their discussions into haunting spectres, which force listeners to imaginatively reconstruct scenes of female-directed violence, while acknowledging the ethics of their complicity in the propagation and popularisation of these narratives (Greer 2017, 153).

Yet as Greer's quote alludes to, *My Favorite Murder* is in an ambiguous and contested space that straddles complicity and critique. The podcast can be understood to reiterate narratives of violence and murder. However, as Badmington (2003, 16) points out, repetition 'can be a form of questioning: to restate is not always to reinstate'. *My Favorite Murder* can be interpreted as reiterating narratives of violence and murder for the purpose of producing counter-cultural moral discourses, in particular about violent death and gender. In this way, the podcast can be understood as engaged in the moral work of social action, representing violent crime as a societal issue that sits within a wider social, political, and cultural context. Similarly, in deviating from dominant modes of reporting and discussing violent crime and in its centring of female perspectives through its two female hosts, the podcast can be seen to undertake the moral work of social action in foregrounding something that is otherwise absent from public discourse, providing a unique perspective in its emphasis on comedy and on the sociocultural inequalities that inform violent crime and specifically murder.

A primary attraction for *My Favorite Murder* listeners may be in response to the anxiety perpetuated by mainstream media reporting of violent crime against women. As Pavelko and Gall Myrick (2020, 167) have highlighted, much of the discussion on the podcast 'centres on addressing anxieties related to violence and murder that are typically glossed

over in other media'. Pavelko and Gall Myrick (2020) emphasize that it is not only the discussion of such content but the development of a community around it that functions to support the mental health and wellbeing of audiences (Pavelko and Myrick's study focused specifically on participants with a mental health diagnosis). The findings of Pavelko and Gall Myrick's (2020) study support this article's positioning of the podcast as generative of a collaboratively provocative morbid space in which audiences can explore morality and mortality, with both the hosts and audiences engaging in the altruistic moral work of creating a space to talk about violence and provide catharsis for violence-related anxiety. Marks (2017) has also argued that *My Favorite Murder's* engagement with murder and mental health 'empowers listeners by offering practical advice for survival and self-care and by using comedy to deflate the scariness of these topics'. This altruistic moral work challenges several normative moral discourses, specifically those focused on the notion that it is inappropriate to publicly discuss the violent murders of others, in part given that it might reify harm and trauma for the victims' loved ones. That catharsis for wider audiences can be gained from the open discussion of murder, violence and the sociocultural inequalities that inform them suggests that the hosts and audiences are engaged in producing counter cultural (im)moral discourses. As mentioned above, these are discourses which counter normative moral discourses, and which might be deemed immoral by many, but which we term '(im)moral' to account for differing perspectives that different people can draw as to what is 'moral' or 'immoral'. Specifically, these (im)moral discourses foreground the idea that rather than inappropriate, it is vital to discuss and engage with violence against women and the sociocultural factors informing it in an accessible way (and in an accessible format) in order to facilitate audiences to grapple with the emotional effects of wide scale cultural violence.

The altruistic moral work of the podcast hosts and audiences might also go further than offering catharsis through the production and sharing of strategies to manage the possible reality of personally experiencing violence. As noted earlier in this article, Vicary and Fraley (2010, 82) have shown that female fans are attracted to true crime partly in an attempt to identify 'potential survival cues' that might be applied to themselves and others from the content they encounter there. Moore's (2009) study of university aged women's perceived risk of being a victim of date rape identified that in mass media representation, it was not men's deviant behaviour that was being marginalized but instead women's behaviours associated with increased risk of victimization. Unlike a 'moral panic' where a 'folk devil' needs to be identified to assign blame and responsibility for a societal problem, Moore locates this area of media representation at another end of a spectrum of societal moral regulation: the 'cautionary tale' (Moore 2009). The cautionary tale puts the onus on women to manage their behaviours to avoid being the victim of crime. *My Favorite Murder* has a complex relationship to the notion of the 'cautionary tale'. Whilst the podcast offers a range of examples of learning strategies from the 'cautionary tales' provided in its episodes, it simultaneously engages in a critique of such messages and of the victim-blaming tendencies evident across so much of the present day (and historical) cultural landscape.

The strapline that the hosts repeat at the end of episodes (and the title of the hosts' book) is 'Stay Sexy and Don't Get Murdered'. On the one hand this is gesturing towards and seeking to undermine problematic victim-blaming messages (or 'cautionary tales') often expressed by authorities, in the media and more broadly in a range of cultural

contexts, in particular in the aftermath of high-profile murders. These messages dictate that women should avoid going out at night alone and not dress in a way that might put them at risk – suggesting that wearing revealing clothing, for example, might lead to a woman being raped or murdered. By stating ‘Stay Sexy *and* Don’t Get Murdered’ (authors’ emphasis) the hosts are indicating that it is possible to both ‘Stay Sexy’ and at the same time, not become a victim. As such the hosts are challenging the idea that women should avoid dressing ‘sexily’ to avoid being murdered. Yet at the same time, the directive to ‘Stay Sexy and Don’t Get Murdered’ throughout the podcast, and the positioning of the hosts’ book as a ‘definitive how-to guide’ to doing this, is inevitably complicit in the message it is seeking to critique, implying agency of the part of the listener and reader to protect themselves against the violent actions of others. A similar message is conveyed on the book’s promotional dustjacket, which reads as follows:

In a culture that mythologises killers, celebrates ‘personality-corrupting toxic masculinity bullshit,’ and holds victims responsible for the violence committed against them, Karen and Georgia preach self-advocacy, self-love, and freedom from responsibility for other people’s choices [...] Karen and Georgia are here to encourage you to put your own needs first, *stay out of the forest* (authors’ emphasis), and become unfuckwithable.

We draw particular attention to the text ‘stay out of the forest’ from this message, which prescribes the reader to take certain actions to protect themselves, which arguably runs contrary to the message of having ‘freedom from responsibility for other people’s choices’. If they had freedom, they would be free to go into the forest if they pleased. These contrary discourses are also evident in podcast episodes. Reflecting on their childhoods the hosts chastise themselves for their former behaviour such as walking home alone or skipping school to hang out when no one knew where they were. They reflect: ‘we’re so lucky to have survived’ (e.5, 38:30). Yet elsewhere in the podcast the hosts have criticized and apportioned blame on the failure of police to take women’s witness testimony seriously and respond accordingly, resulting in further victimization of women. The hosts present both moral and practical complexities, treading a line that is advocating both safety and social awareness. Here, the hosts can again be understood to participate (along with audiences, listener comments, their own stories, online interaction, and live show events) in the moral work of political action by foregrounding murder as a personal and societal issue.

The *My Favorite Murder* hosts as ‘(im)moral entrepreneurs’

In literature on the phenomenon of moral panics there is contestation as to how to define the broad spectrum of social forces of moral regulation, of which ‘moral panics’ and ‘cautionary tales’ can be considered polar opposite components (Moore 2013). Yet with the rise of more democratic media outlets such as podcasting, facilitating platforms to mass audiences that bypass conventional mass media reporting, there is greater potential for challenges to dominant moral regulation through counter cultural responses that define new moral boundaries. A person who reaps reward by moralizing a particular issue can be understood to be a ‘moral entrepreneur’ (Becker 2017). In the case of the *My Favorite Murder* podcast, the hosts could be defined as ‘(im)moral entrepreneurs’. They are ‘immoral’ in the way they (1) position their discourse as part

of a comedy podcast; (2) challenge moral hegemony by saying it is okay to discuss the sensitive subject area of murder, and thereby challenging what is moral (or seeking to *de-moralize* the issue); and (3) are women speaking publicly about historically taboo topics related to violent crime. They are 'entrepreneurs' because they are reaping financial reward by engaging with these moral discourses. Importantly, '(im)moral' is not used as a value judgement here, but as a way to characterize how the hosts' media representations could be positioned as immoral, as non-normative and counter-cultural, in relation to dominant and moral mainstream media representations, and how the challenges to moral regulation serve to create a provocative morbid space. Again, this is why we have adopted parentheses in the term *(im)moral entrepreneurs*, emphasizing the bounded and complex ways in which judgements about morality and immorality can be applied.

In how the hosts' moral discourses play out in relation to the spectrum of moral regulation, *My Favorite Murder* takes an alternative approach to the 'cautionary tale', one which is, at least partially, counter cultural to mainstream public discourse. The approach is counter cultural, and provocative, in that the hosts regularly (though not always) challenge normative assumptions (for example, about what women victims are expected to do to manage their risk of victimization, while explicitly discussing and assigning responsibility to other individuals e.g. the perpetrator, groups e.g. men; the police, and/or systems, e.g. judiciary; wider society). For instance, the hosts will regularly discuss a common trope in recounting stories of how women became victims by responding politely to men's predatory behaviours. The hosts counter normative assumptions that women should be polite and passive, as a social norm, instead encouraging listeners to 'fuck politeness', as one of their recurring catchphrases. However, this counter cultural approach is also partial, because the stories that the hosts tell often contain advice for how not to become a victim of violent crimes (as the instance above also illustrates). This is both in terms of implicit components of the stories being told that the listener can draw lessons from themselves, and in terms of explicit talking points that the hosts discuss as critical tellers and listeners of the stories that they report (each host serves as both teller and listener for each other's stories in each episode). Consequently, the podcast and its affiliated merchandise can be understood as both complicit in and critical of discourses about the gender politics of murder.

Hoffman and Hobbs (2021, 158) highlight that the hosts of *My Favorite Murder* 'show a willingness to exploit the stories in their care for monetary gain' and that in doing so, 'an implied moral obligation to victims is jettisoned in favour of brand building and commerciality.' Their work is a grounding reminder that the moral work of the podcast content is at best a component of a synthesis between genuine topic interest and commerciality, or otherwise a secondary concern or by-product of commercial decisions by the hosts for how they create and perform their content. However, Hoffman and Hobbs (2021, 163) conclude in their examination of depictions of female victimhood in post-Me Too true crime that despite stories of violence towards women sometimes perpetuating the true crime genre's problematic elements, the circulation and popularity of *My Favorite Murder* (and other examples of post-Me Too true crime) offers 'a platform for more women to create, narrate and engage with a type of true crime that takes into account their voices and their stories.' This illustrates the broader societal value and impact of the (im)moral entrepreneurship the hosts have engaged in to shape and change public discourse in this area.

Conclusion

This paper, building on Penfold-Mounce's (2018) definition of provocative morbid space, identifies the true crime comedy podcast *My Favorite Murder* as a collaborative provocative morbid space. Further, competing moral narratives in the podcast produce an adapted 'cautionary tale' approach to the reporting of crime, which advocates both safety and social awareness for the audience. In undertaking this moral work in the production of content, we argue that the hosts are acting as what we term (im)moral entrepreneurs, collaboratively producing counter cultural (im)moral discourses with their audiences while also reaping financial reward for the commercial success their content generates, which has set a precedent for emerging media content in the area of true crime. This paper signposts areas of attention for further examination in podcasting studies and more broadly concerning the public critiquing of discourses (particularly pertinent in the current age of 'cancel culture'), as well as to processes of negotiation in a complex moral mediascape that has become saturated and requires innovation, and increasingly provocation, to achieve popularity and commercial success. In offering the terms counter cultural (im)moral discourse and (im)moral entrepreneurs, the article encourages further critical engagement with the moral work of those in the public sphere who can be understood to both challenge and/or be complicit in societally complex, and potentially both simultaneously progressive and problematic, moral messaging.

Note

1. We acknowledge that the expletives used here may be offensive to some readers. However, we have adopted them at certain points in this article, following precedent on provocative podcasting scholarship (Meserko 2015). This decision has been made to facilitate discussion of this aspect of the podcast and to demonstrate the tone of the podcast to those readers unfamiliar with it.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s). The authors have contributed equally to this work.

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