The Criminalization of Student Protest at McGill University

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Student activism and protest is labelled as deviant and criminal by McGill University administrators since – at least – the late 1960s. Despite this situation, students continue to mobilize and organize against perceived injustices. Criminological theories can explain the reason of their involvement (and lack thereof). Examining McGill University as a state can help us understand why and how control is used to regulate, limit or repress student dissent. These phenomena will be analyzed with the help of specific examples of recent

and historical student activist actions.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to study the student movement at McGill University from a criminological perspective. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that student dissent is often labelled as deviant and criminalized by campus and local authorities. Hence, I will extrapolate the main ideas and principles of established criminology theories – originally used to explain working-class crime – and apply them to the context of student activism in order to explain why some students engage in activism and protest while others do not.

Examining McGill University as a state, I will analyze why and how the different actors and departments of the University act like policing agents – enforcing norms and exercising control – to prevent, limit, or regulate student activism.

I will conclude this essay by presenting with great detail two protests in which students were arrested by the Montreal police, which I believe are relevant to the purpose of this essay: *McGill Francais'* March 1969 protest and the disruption by an informal group of student activists of Choose Life's "Echoes of the Holocaust," an anti-abortion event in October 2009.

The majority of the examples of student activism provided in this essay refer to the periods 1967-1970 and 2006-2010 and were chosen due to their historical relevance and my recent direct and indirect involvement with them.

Be informed that this paper has no intention whatsoever to fully explain the complex dynamics of engagement, power, norms, law enforcement, and outcomes of the broader Student Movement or to provide a complete historical picture of student activism at McGill University.

THE STUDENT MOVEMENT: THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL

The Student Movement erupted and saw its glory days in the late 1960s throughout the world. From Prague to Mexico City to Paris to Montreal, students were organizing around global and local issues; dissent and rebelliousness their most accessible tools.

Some students networked with broader social movements and made demands on macro socio-political issues. They protested the Vietnam War and supported the implementation of civil rights – among many causes – by organizing rallies and protests on their campuses and in the streets (Staggenborg, 2008).

Others focused in local issues and attempted to transform the way their universities were managed in order to eventually affect society as a whole (idem). Students had a long list of demands and goals: rights of decision-making in academic areas, faculties and boards of trustees and the establishment of participatory democracy (Lyman and Scott, 1970). They also protested the corporatization and privatization of their campuses (tuition hikes) as well as the constant violation of their rights of speech and association.

The late 1960s saw the emergence of regional and national student groups, like Students for a Democratic Society (Staggenborg, 2008) that joined forces in order to achieve shared goals. By

lobbying education ministries and organizing city-wide protests, organized students pressured their administrations and their local, regional, and national governments.

McGILL UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT MOVEMENT

Student activism was and is a part of McGill University's history. During the 1960s (Mills, 2007) the university experienced a period of highly militant activism that redistributed power between students and administrators and hence, established the “rules” of student activism.

For example, during 1968-1969 students occupied offices and disrupted meetings to gain seats on departmental committees and Senate. As a member of UGEQ (*Union General des Etudiants du Quebec*) McGill students alongside Quebecker students rallied and took the streets in support for the causes of the *Front de Liberation du Quebec* (FLQ) and other education-related demands (SSMU, 2010).

More recently, in the past five years, left-leaning *radical* students have formed groups like GRASPE[1] (*Grass-Roots Association for Student Power*) and *Mobilization McGill*[2]. These collectives had disrupted Army recruitment tables and staged *die-ins* trying to demilitarize McGill; locked the doors of the James Administration Building to fight tuition increases; lobbied for student-

1 For more information on GRASPE's past activities visit http://grasp.wordpress.com

2 Members of Mobilization McGill [groups.google.ca/group/mobilization_mcgill?hl=en] eventually created today's popular left-leaning student activist collective known as Mob Squad [http://www.facebook.com/groups/mobsquad/]

consultation committees; and rallied for student-run cafeterias while criticizing corporate food systems on campus through organized boycotts - among other actions.

DEVIANCE, CRIME AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Student dissent is labelled by University administrators and local police officers as deviant and in some cases as criminal. Student dissent can range from peaceful demonstrations, protests and staged civil disobedience to violent riots; in all these cases students challenge the *status quo* of their universities (and larger societies) and the legitimacy of authority (Lovell, 2009).

First of all, what do we understand as deviance? And most importantly, what is the logic behind rebelliousness? Why do some students engage in non-conformism and protest – while others do not?

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology ("Deviance.", Scott and Marshall, 2005) deviance is referred to as *a)* a pattern of norm violation, and as *b)* a stigma construct, a label bestowed upon certain classes of behaviour at certain times, which then become devalued, discredited, and often excluded.

While it is a general belief that crime and deviance in our society is bad - and therefore punishable - scholars like Emile Durkheim see this phenomenon as a positive characteristic of any given society. For him, crime is "necessary [...] and indispensable for the evolution of morality and law" (Durkheim: 70). Durkheim's "great moral innovators" are those who challenge legal boundaries and bring about needed changes in our social units (Durkheim, 1982).

Crime can be seen as *virtue* (Lovell, 2009) when the actions expose the existing injustices in the prevailing political climate. Students deliberately violate laws, occupy buildings and engage in civil disobedience with the intention to educate or persuade the student body (or the larger society)

of a perceived injustice; their transgressions have the intention to bring about a change in the current social structures.

Rebellious and non-conforming students are therefore agents of change within a system governed by systemic structures of oppression.

In order to further explain why some individuals chose to use deviant actions to transform their political environments, I will defer to the established theories of strain, deferential association and cultural criminology. On the other hand, control, symbolic interactionism, labelling, and deterrence theory will be used in order to describe why certain individuals restrain themselves from deviant and criminal behaviours.

Robert Merton's (1963) strain theory states that some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in society to engage in non-conforming rather than conforming conduct (Merton: 132). Merton assumes there's a common set of values and desired goals in any given society, i.e. the “American dream.” He defines conformity as the acceptance of the cultural goals and the institutional (legal) means to achieve them. Some individuals aren't capable of accessing these goals by institutional means, thus a problem of adjustment arises (Cohen, 1955). The failure to attain these societal expectations creates a feeling of deprivation and alienation (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960).

Individuals who share the same feelings will bond together to provide each other with status, security, and a sense of belonging; a new set of values, beliefs, and identities will eventually crystallize in the form of a subculture (Cohen, 1955). Collective solutions to their problems as well as new (delinquent) values and norms will be generated (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960).

Merton (1963) also describes other possible paths to the adjustment problem, he discusses innovation which consists in accepting the goals but rejecting the institutional means and rebellion which consists in rejecting both means and goals and thus creating new ones.

Extrapolating Merton's ideas, it can be said that the inaccessibility to real decision-making power on the University's public matters as well as on the macro socio-political issues generated *strain* for the students.

When *McGill Francais*[3] organized a march in 1969 in which more than 10,000 individuals took the streets demanding the *francisation* of McGill University to respond to the needs of the francophone community (Commission des Affaires Francophones, 2009), it became clear that many students felt frustrated and angry toward the university's Anglo-Saxon *dominance*.

Two years before, in 1967, hundreds of McGill students took over the James Administration building to protest the disciplinary charges Principal Rocke Robertson and the administration enforced – behind closed doors - against the student John Fekete and *The Daily*[4] editors as a response to the publishing of a grotesque article that described necrophilia between J.F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson (Tarabukhina, 2010). During this occupation, a group of 30 students broke into the Principal's office with the intention to occupy it but were soon forcibly removed by the police.

These actions culminated respectively, in the *arguable* implementation of policies to attain bilingualism and to meet the needs of the francophone community within McGill University; and the addition of student seats in the Board of Governors and Senate.

McGill students were facing a problem of adjustment after failing to attain their cultural and political goals on campus through formal (legal) mechanisms. Out of frustration, students organized collectively and after forming new identities and values, implemented direct actions to attain their goals through rebellious and innovative strategies.

Another theory that can explain student engagement is Sutherland and Cressey's differential association. They discuss the phenomena of 'flocking' and 'feathering' (Sutherland and Cressey,

3 McGill Francais will be further explained at the end of this essay.
4 One of McGill's campus newspapers.

1966) which consist in the tendency to choose interactions with similar others and the tendency of persons to mutually influence one another.

For them, crime and deviance are learnt through the same learning mechanisms that are used in any other form of learning. It is through direct and intimate associations that individuals acquire necessary criminal techniques and motives from peers (idem). Only certain associations with a particular frequency, duration, priority and intensity can be capable of influencing the individual's internalization of criminal behaviour.

As Akers (1998) specifies, students are rational actors that are not pressured, but *influenced* to imitate the behaviour of others. Students tend to imitate someone whose behaviour and performance is reinforced by others or when they see the person giving off signs of pleasure (Bandura, 1977).

At McGill University, older generations of student activists pass on the knowledge, skills and experience to newer generations through institutionalized student groups and also informally through spontaneous protests, teach-ins and workshops. As part of a greater activist environment, web blogs, independently published *zines*[5], videos and journal archives serve as 'how-to' guides for activism, direct action and civil disobedience.

Annual events like QPIRG-McGill's[6] Rad Frosh (*alternative* freshmen week for students), serve as a way to transmit and preserve the historical memory of McGill's activist legacy. Workshops, historical walking tours, conferences and documentary screenings convey the state of affairs of the student movement to first year students – potential activists – that will eventually take the place of older activists that leave campus as they graduate.

5 Magazines.

6 Quebec Public Interest Research Group; a social-justice oriented *umbrella* organization for campus and community organizations.

Formal activities like Rad Frosh as well as spontaneous protests and rallies serve as a networking space for potential-activists to meet engaged students that they esteem as popular or "well connected" and eventually enter the student-activist sphere,[7] a sphere in which friendships and loyalties are created and skills, ideals, and values are transferred.

Cultural criminologists believe that dissent and protest can be pleasant and fun. The transgression of rules and the disregard for social norms and political hierarchies can become liberating and personally meaningful (Lovell: 25). For some students, engaging in fringe activities can reach the form of liberation from personal anxieties and as a mode of communion and consciousness expansion (Lyman: 47). The idea that protesting can be fun is supported by the fact that organized rallies have attracted hundreds of students that would normally not attend core-activist meetings or less emotionally-charged activities. For example, last September's rally for the Architecture Cafe[8] was attended by approximately 400-500 students – one of the largest rallies in McGill's recent history.

WHAT STOPS STUDENTS FROM PROTESTING?

Shouldn't we expect every single student to engage in dissent considering the existence of social injustices on campus and on their larger communities? In order to answer this question, I will refer to Hirschi's control theory – one of the most used nowadays – as well as symbolic interactionism, labelling and deterrence theory.

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7 After being a 2010 Rad Frosh leader and giving a workshop and walking tour on McGill's Environmental and Political groups I was befriended and *respected* by many first year students. Some of them became regular volunteers at certain student groups I introduced them to.

8 In the summer 2010 the last student-run Cafe was closed by the administration *arguably* without student consultation; this ignited a cycle of student protest pushing for student control over food systems and a fight against the corporatization of campus. For more information read Carol Fraser's commentary "Let us eat cake!" at http://mcgilldaily.com/articles/35287

Hirschi (1969) describes a social bond between the individual and society that regulates its conduct. He identifies four elements: 1) attachment to the opinion of others, 2) commitment to the previously built reputation, 3) involvement with conventional persons and activities and 4) belief in the moral righteousness of the shared values and norms. The more an individual experiences those characteristics, the less are the chances to incur in criminal behaviour.

For Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) dissent is a rational decision in which costs (risks) and benefits are carefully considered, a decision in which rewards and punishments dictate the behaviour of the individual.

Logically, not every single student at McGill University believes the current social structures are unjust or morally wrong. Some students give a lot of importance of what others think of them and had invested great amounts of time, money and energy to build reputations and academic careers that can be damaged if engaged in fringe activities.

In addition, not every student has had the chance to become sensitized about the current issues and struggles. And even if certain students truly desired to engage in activism, not all of them have sufficient time and opportunities to express themselves politically; each student has a unique set of responsibilities and priorities.

Symbolic interactionism and labelling theory provide ideas that can also help explain why certain individuals restrain themselves from deviant behaviours as a reaction to informal control from others. Matsueda (1992) states that social interactions are always characterized by behavioural expectations which attach to specific positions in society and link individuals to certain ‘roles’. The individual’s actions are limited and regulated by what *the others* expect. Certain actions can be blocked by shame or fear to be labelled and identified as a norm-breaker. Since the status of deviant is a ‘master status’ that overrides all other statuses (Becker, 1963), engaging in deviant and criminal behaviours signifies a huge social risk for certain individuals.

Today's McGill University activists – generalizing for the sake of presenting a *picture*- can be identified by the way they dress, the way they speak (queer-positive, gender-equal/neutral), the student journal they read (the McGill Daily), the places they eat (Midnight Kitchen[9]) and a long *etcetera*. They are all following roles, expected behaviours, and generally sharing similar political stands. In the eyes of less-progressive students and administrators, these students are clearly identifiable from the *other type* of student and labelled as deviant, different and in some cases criminal.

Befriending or becoming a student activist imposes a label to the student. Once that identity has been assumed (and the cultural symbols adopted), chances are the individual will be subject to more control and policing from campus authorities and other students. Organizing and participating in protests can create a *certain kind* of reputation that administrators, professors and even potential-employers will keep in mind – especially if a criminal record is attached to that reputation.

Deterrence theorists believe obedience can be explained by the fear of sanctions that result from failure to comply with authority (Lovell: 10). We have become obedient, conforming to norms and values and fearing apparatuses of coercion, even in the face of widespread injustices, so long as we can guarantee that law and order will prevail.

Engaging in fringe student activism could lead to academic suspension or expulsion from McGill University; a criminal record; and consequently, to certain extent, limit the student's access to jobs or admission to graduate school.

NORMS AND CONTROL AT McGILL UNIVERSITY

9 A vegan, by-donation, student-run daily soup kitchen inside the Students' Society building.

Let us consider McGill University as a state - as an agglomeration of institutions that have the authority to make norms, and set the parameters that rule political conflicts between various interests over the use of resources and the direction of public policy ("State.", Scott and Marshall, 2005).

As a state, the university holds a *status quo* and reacts to the activities of classes and pressure groups within society (the campus community). In order to maintain the *status quo*, dissent and rebellion is criminalized and policed.

Conflict theorists state that the dynamic of drafting and enforcing laws exposes a social structure rooted in power in which a political majority imposes its values on a political minority (Lovell: 17). Individuals who don't sympathize with the political majority will have their dissent defined as "criminal" by the State (Matsueda, 1988).

It is important for us to question who created these norms and how? Who controls determines what and who are controlled (Wilson: 471). Let us examine then, in a general way, the structures of power at McGill University that control, limit and regulate student protest and dissent.

Student activism at McGill University is influenced by particular actors and regulated by the University's Code of Conduct (the Students Rights and Responsibilities), as well as by local and provincial law. Administrators and their bureaucratic structures represent the government; Security Services represent the policing body; the Dean of Students and Student Disciplinary Officers represent the courts and judges; the Ombudsperson and the McGill Legal Information Clinic represent a third-party impartial advocate and legal counsellors; and the University journals represent the Media.

The procedure by which a student is processed by the normative apparatus of McGill University, as of 2010, is the following[10]: When a student is committing a non-permitted activity,

10 This information was given to me, via e-mail, by Jane Everett, Dean of Students of McGill University.

Security Services will ask for his/her student ID number to prove his/her membership to the school (McGill University is private property and *aliens* could be expelled from the premises). Depending on the seriousness of the activity, a report will be made by the Security guard containing the student's ID number, name and a description of the occurred event. This report will then reach the Dean of Students and a file (disciplinary record) will be opened, if necessary. The student will then be invited to a disciplinary interview or hearing by a Disciplinary Officer (or by the Committee on Student Discipline) in which a sanction of reprimand, suspension, dismissal or expulsion could be decided upon. Students on academic probation can be severely reprimanded and/or expelled if they engage for a second time in rebellious behaviours.

It is assumed that any given society (or University) has a set of clearly defined and fixed norms and values. The mechanisms for ensuring conformity to these norms can either be coercive or ideological (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Coercive control is particular to institutions like the Police or the Army. Ideological control is particular to mass media and the pressure of peers. Control has the objective to assure social order *at any cost*, but also, to exert and establish relations of power and domination from the powerful groups of society to the rest.

THE USE OF FORCE AND CRIMINALIZATION OF DISSENT

Until recently, police officers were known to react against protests with the use of force and violence (*escalated force* approach) in order to repress those who dared to rebel (Wilson, 1977). Many student movements around the world were met by police and military indiscriminate force, for example during the student protests of Mexico City in 1968, police and army officers murdered hundreds of students (Poniatowska, 1998).

On December 1968, activists occupied McGill's computer data centre as a form of protest against Bertrand's planned law to guarantee English-language schooling rights in the province; they were soon forcibly removed by the police riot squad (Mills, 2007). The *escalated force* approach has not proved effective against truly committed student activists and has also raised concerns about the violation of protesters' right to speech and assembly as well as other civil liberties (Lovell: 111).

In October 2010, student's right of speech and assembly were violated at McGill University. Students (including myself) were removed from school premises by Security Services when they were talking to passersby about QPIRG-McGill in front of an anti-QPIRG table hosted by Conservative McGill[11] students (Martone, 2010).

Our request of information regarding the supposed violation we were incurring, as well as the mention of our right of speech was met by intimidation and eventually by force from McGill's Security Services guard. The issue was not sufficient to make a case with McGill's neutral-party conflict adviser, the Ombudsperson.[12] The same situation happened twice in one week.

As a way to address these civil liberties violations, a new method to control crowds known as *negotiated management* (McCarthy *et al*, 1998) was adopted by the police. The use-of-force was replaced by a series of permits and policies that regulate protests. Despite the existence of basic constitutional rights of speech and association, time, place and manners of dissent need to be negotiated with local authorities (or campus administrators) and permitted by those in power.

The role and objective of the police officer is then, that of minimizing disruption by *regulating* the demonstrators; this method also serves as a screen that allows only moderate criticisms to the *status quo* while rejecting radical views. Whenever protestors transgress the

11 A university chapter of the Conservative Party of Canada, that has over the years run campaigns to defund the PIRG.
12 McGill's Ombudsperson, Dr. Spencer Boudreau, was visited. Not much could be done due to a lack of strong evidence and due to the blurriness and flexibility of interpretation of McGill's Code of Conduct. See annex.

permitted boundaries of dissent, policing bodies will recur – as before – to the escalated force approach to control and suppress crowds (idem).

McGill University regulates student-initiated on-campus outdoor events (protests included) through the Campus and Space Planning Office. Permits are issued stipulating the time, place and kind of activities allowed. Students who engage in direct actions without a permit will be asked by Security Services to stop the event, disperse or face the consequences.

A clear contradiction exists between the students' right to assemble and protest, stipulated on the Students Rights and Responsibilities,[13] and the structure of permits and regulations that controls 'radical' student voices.[14] This contradiction is, for some, a source of strain and an evidence of the power imbalances between the controlled and the controllers, the students and the administrators.

MONTREAL POLICE AND MCGILL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

In most cases, protest, rebellion and non-conformism are dealt with internally by Security Services and the University. In some cases, the local police are called if a student is involved in a very serious offence described in federal or provincial law or when considered necessary by university authorities. I will shortly describe two instances in which McGill University students were arrested by the Montreal Police; *McGill Francais*'s 1969 protest and the 2009 disruption of an anti-abortion event hosted by the McGill chapter of Choose Life.

McGILL FRANCAIS

13 Section A, part II, article 5-c) states: "Nothing in this Article or Code shall be construed to prohibit peaceful assemblies and demonstrations, lawful picketing, or to inhibit free speech".

14 In order to prove my point, I submitted an "Application for Outdoor Events" requesting permission to stage a die-in protest outside of the James Administration Building in order to criticize McGill's involvement with the Military. It was approved but with certain conditions that eliminated the *spirit* of a die-in protest. See Annex.

On March 28, 1969 more than 10,000 attended a protest organized by *McGill Francais* demanding that the university should adopt French as their official language and serve the people of Quebec (Moore, 2004). This protest was part of a bigger plan denominated “Operation McGill” which consisted in smaller protests, Senate and Board of Governors meeting disruptions, publication of leftist articles in The McGill Daily, alliances with Quebecois students, nationalists and workers and province-wide conferences – among other actions (Gray, 2004).

McGill Francais was integrated by student leaders, Daily editors, leftist activists and “radical” professors (Mills, 2007). Led by the recently-fired Political Science McGill professor Stanley Gray, activists demanded McGill University to become a French-language university, decrease tuition, open the McLennan Library to the public and to serve the Quebecois people and working-classes (idem). On a broader level, they also protested the legacy of colonialism, the injustices of capitalism, anglophone control over the Quebec economy, and the inadequacy of the francophone education system (idem); issues that McGill University symbolically represented as being an elitist uni-lingual bastion of anglophone dominance (Provart, 1999).

The radical leftist student movement at McGill University was divided about *McGill Francaise*'s campaign. Some students, and even the Vice-Principal (Academic) Michael Oliver, believed in the need of McGill University to accommodate the needs of the francophone community (Chester, 1999); they also recognized that by uniting with the Quebecker activists, their influence and power in the larger community would increase (Mills, 2007). Others, simply didn't suppor*t the* demands and actions of Operation McGill.

McGill Francaise's protest was surprisingly peaceful (Provart, 1999), students waved flags, chanted songs, and carried placards. Since university administrators were expecting an attack on the

university[15], the riot police was called. Over 2700 security officers were deployed, hundreds camped inside McGill University, and helicopters circled the crowds (Mills, 2007). Organizers and protesters were arrested without cause, later released and had their papers confiscated (Gray, 2004). Despite the illegality of the detentions, this strategy proved effective to disperse the crowd.

The outcomes of Operation McGill can be interpreted as victories or losses. Months after the protest, the Quebec government announced the future opening of the Université du Quebec à Montreal (UQAM). It provided university education for newly-graduated francophone CEGEP students but, on the other hand, it was argued that the opening of UQAM was unnecessary, since three good universities already existed (Provart, 1999). Despite language policies adopted shortly after the March 1969 protest, forty years later, McGill is still predominantly an English-language university. McGill University hasn't yet become significantly accessible for the Quebecois working classes (Chester, 1999).

Operation McGill should be seen as a part of a greater movement which challenged language policies, social justice, and education systems in Quebec during the late 1960s (Provort, 1999).

McGill Francaise's protest was the biggest in the history of McGill University: their actions, strategies, and framing of issues have become ideal examples that future generations of McGill student activists still remember and follow today.

DISRUPTING CHOOSE LIFE'S "ECHOES OF THE HOLOCAUST"

15 In January of the same year, students had occupied the computer centre at Sir George Williams University (Concordia University today) and in February the FLQ had bombed the Montreal Stock Exchange.

On October 6, 2009 after protesting and disrupting a Choose Life (anti-abortion) sponsored event called "Echoes of the Holocaust,"[16] two McGill University students[17] were arrested by Montreal police and charged with mischief (Hale, 2009).

Student activists believed Jose Ruba of the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform had no *legal* right to speak at McGill University (Kaufman and Mayes, 2009) since his presentation contained a message of hatred, which is prohibited by the Student's Society Equity Policy, McGill Students Rights and Responsibilities and by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Before the event took place, debates between SSMU[18] and McGill administration regarding the legality and limits of free speech were held. University administrators ignored SSMU's request to censor and cancel the event while claiming Choose Life had the right to host the conference despite its *polemic* nature and the negative reactions of a considerably representative student population.

As the presentation began, twenty or so students began chanting songs, banging desks and eventually blocking the presentation screen (Craine, 2009). Security Services asked the protestors to leave but then backed off; without requesting students their ID's or trying another alternative, Montreal police were called.

When Montreal police arrived to McGill University, Sgt. Baccardi informed the students they could be charged with mischief and obstruction of justice if they continued being disruptive (Hale, 2009). Baccardi gave the protestors five minutes to disperse, two of them refused to do so and were arrested; later on the charges were dropped (Craine, 2009).

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16 This event, hosted at McGill's Leacock Building room 232, tried to show how abortion dehumanizes unborn children in the same way the holocaust dehumanized Jews.

17 Their names won't be mentioned in this essay in order to protect their privacy. The author contacted them and spoke with other protesters that were part of the actions.

18 Students' Society of McGill University.

After the incident, university administrators and Choose Life members felt their right to host the *permitted* event was unfairly disturbed by radical student agitators. On the other hand, the student activists believed, in the first place, that the event was by principle *illegal* (despite the administration's wrongful permission) and that their rights of speech and assembly had been violated when being arrested (idem).

1969 AND 2009: THE SAME SPIRIT

What motivated students to protest in these two cases, and why was their dissent labelled and policed by the university authorities?

The criminological theories that I previously described can help us reach an answer to my essay's main questions. In both events, student activists felt strain toward an injustice McGill University was responsible for. In the late 1960s, McGill University was reinforcing a system of Anglo-Saxon dominance and oppression; in 2009 McGill University allowed an *illegal* hate-speech event on campus grounds. Student activists from both time periods bonded together and created common-values, shared identities and collective solutions to their issues; ultimately they learnt activist skills from one another. Plus, they seemed to enjoy it, on both cases we evidence chant singing and dancing. Despite mechanisms of control and discipline, their attachment and commitment to *mainstream* social norms was weak. They didn't fear being labelled as deviant (most probably they already were) nor they feared the punishment the University and the Montreal police could administer.

McGill University, now and then, with the utmost purpose of protecting their current state of affairs, has ignored or tolerated *light* opposing critiques and opinions to the *status quo;* while policing, labelling, and repressing radical voices and protests, perceived as a threat to stability and social order.

CONCLUSION

McGill Francais's 1969 protest and the disruption of Choose Life's event on 2009 have served as cases for explaining the causes of student activism and the criminalization of protest at McGill University; these events have shown that collective organizing by students with opposing views and fringe methods will be treated as deviant, policed and criminalized by university authorities, despite the existence of rights of speech and assembly at both the university and city level.

The criminology theories explained in this essay – strain, deferential association, control, labelling, symbolic interactionism and deterrence theory - are all able to explain student dissent, non-conformism and protest (or lack there of). Nevertheless, relying on one single criminological theory will result in a limited explanation. We must analyze the students' actions as unique cases and approach the issues holistically, utilizing multiple criminological theories, being aware that many factors influence students' engagement in *criminal* behaviour.

Regardless of McGill's bureaucratic structure of regulations, policing bodies and punishments which hinder dissent, student activism has increased in the last year. Tuition increases, stronger ties with corporations and imposed top-down administration decisions without student consultation on matters that affect student life – result of education funding cuts and provincial austerity plans – will trigger in the next years, I believe, a new cycle of student protest that will most likely be labelled as deviant and policed by McGill University and in the case of bigger protests, by the Montreal police.

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