

# The Representation-Production of Blacks on COPS

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**Abstract:**

This major research paper is an examination of Black suspects on the crime reality television program known as *COPS*. This major research paper is a content analysis of *COPS* and the potential societal effects this may cause. The analysis shows that *COPS* over-represents Whites as police officers and Blacks as criminal suspects in comparison to labor and criminal statistics. The selected pieces of literature suggest that crime reality texts like *COPS* reinforce racist views and the so-called police racism. Citizens live in a mental environment filled with myths and understandings of the world around them. This major research paper focuses on the myth of Blacks and crime. The study is based on the idea that Blacks are overrepresented on *COPS* as criminal suspects perpetuating the Black criminal stereotype, justifying controversial policing practices such as racial profiling, supports and disseminates a law and order/crime control ideology, and makes Black individuals' presence in particular spaces socially unacceptable. The Black criminal stereotype is perpetuated on *COPS* through the over-proportionate representation of Blacks as criminal suspects. This constructs the idea that Blacks are responsible for the majority of crime because of a supposed biological inferiority to the White race. How audiences are likely to interpret the imagery on *COPS* is examined through the lenses of George Gerbner (1988; 1976) and Stuart Hall (2013; 1972). The violence disseminated on *COPS* makes viewers believe the world is more dangerous than it actually is, experience heightened levels of racism, and support law and order/crime control policies and policing. The actuality, ride-along style of *COPS* makes the material seem very natural and not simply a form of entertainment,

but as info-tainment (Information-entertainment). Along with very seamless editing, *COPS* footage appears very realistic. The stereotypical showcase of young Black males committing street crimes works to normalize the realistic appearing content, which acts as a tool to reproduce a racial hierarchy, social order, and White domination. This is shown through multiple content analyses of *COPS*. The bu This has the potential to have a number of implications of viewers supporting crime control polices such as stop and frisk and racial profiling. The constant appearance of Blacks as guilty criminal suspects, has given rise to nation wide suspicion of Blacks males and the enacting of racist legislation designed to deal with the Black threat. The enactment of Castle Doctrines serve as an example of the racial tensions that have been amplified in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The case of Trayvon Martin is discussed in relation to Michel Foucault's disciplinary and biopower and criminalization of the black body and concludes with a discussion of Caucasian perceptions of Black space.

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<sup>1</sup>Castle Doctrines and 'stand-your-ground' laws are legal defenses for individuals charged with criminal homicide. A Castle Doctrine empowers an individual to use reasonable force, including deadly force to defend their respective property, person, or others. Stand-your-ground laws allow individuals to use reasonable force, including deadly force for purposes of self-defense, or where there is reasonable belief of a threat. Stand-your-ground laws do not require individuals to retreat inside of their premise thus allowing individuals to use deadly force in public environments when there is reasonable belief of threat.

**Foreword:**

This major research paper examines the phenomena of the racialization within the television media. In particular, it focuses on the television media text known as *COPS*, and how it engages in problematized portrayals of racialized groups specifically, Blacks. As outlined in the plan of study, this work focuses on the representation of visible minorities in crime reality programs and some of the potential social effects *COPS* may have. Further, this analysis briefly focuses on Blacks in space however, prioritizes the more direct effects *COPS* may have on audiences. This study does not focus on all aspects of *COPS*, but on the characteristics pertaining to race and crime. Although the term “discourse” is seldom mentioned through the major paper, *COPS* is apart of a wider discourse producing a knowledge and interpretation of race and crime.

## The Representation-Production of Blacks on *COPS*

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## **Introduction**

Citizens live in a mental environment populated with various myths and understandings of the world around them. This understanding forms part of their social consciousness. This major research paper is an examination of people believed to have African ancestry, most commonly known as Blacks and their portrayal on the crime reality program *COPS*. In particular, the focus is on Black individuals on the crime reality program known as *COPS*. Further, this paper explores some of the potential implications *COPS* portrayal may have on viewer perceptions of Blacks such as the justification of controversial policing practices such as racial profiling.

*COPS* is a selective portrayal of Black culture, producing an understanding that has come to form a comprehension of a particular demographic. *COPS* predominately portrays an understanding of Black males as criminal others. This selective representation excludes portrayals of Blacks as motivating schoolteachers, businessmen, or as law abiding middle class citizens. This paper wishes to focus on young Black males that *COPS* has primarily portrayed as street criminals and thugs responsible for an overwhelming amount of crime. This portrayal creates problematic viewer interpretations of race and crime.

This analysis is going to focus on the mythology of race and policing<sup>2</sup>. Black crime has been mythologized into a stereotypical understanding of Black men as thugs who are inherently evil, dangerous, and prone to criminal behavior. (Russell, 2008). This is a subject that has been examined within a wide body of literature and perspectives. My analysis is grounded in the works of Gerbner et al (1998; 1976), Zillman et al (2000; 1975), Hall et al (2013; 1972), Colaguori (2012; 2010), Gitlin (1979), and Barthes (1957). Gerbner et als (1976) cultivation theory focuses on how frequent television viewers tend to view the world as a much more mean and dangerous place in comparison to less frequent television viewers. Zillman et al (2000; 1975) focuses on how viewers make moral judgments about characters and take pleasure when heroine characters enjoy success. Hall et als (1972; 1978) examination of mugging in 1970's Britain provides a parallel understanding of the perception of street crime today and simultaneously the different ways viewers can interpret media messages. Colaguori (2012) focuses on how the crime genre has become a spectacle of good vs. evil with conflict acting as a central tool for media entertainment. Barthes (1957) explores how particular myths and signifiers have become normalized and apart of common sense. Finally, Barthes (1957) explores

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<sup>2</sup> According to Barthes, mythologies are a special type of speech. Myth is not just a genre of story, but a way of saying or describing. For Barthes, the unique part of myths is its ability to present the ideology or values, as if it were natural. In reality, the myth is nothing more than a socially constructed perspective. A myth does not describe the objective, expected state, but expresses the intentions of the storyteller. In this analysis, I use myth to describe how both criminal and Black myths have been constructed in a stereotypical fashion that they become 'normal.'

how the media is used as a tool to disseminate dominant ideologies for the purposes of naturalization.

*COPS* content analyses have become widespread in media crime literature. Scholars such as Oliver (1994), Monk-Turner et al (2007), Mastro (2005) have all done content analysis of *COPS* and crime reality programming in some fashion. Consistently, these analyses have shown that *COPS* over represents Blacks as criminal suspects and Whites as police officers. Within society there is a strong association between Blacks and crime. While *COPS* is not solely responsible for this, it acts as an influential source of 'info-tainment' molding societal social consciousness. Studies have shown that viewers do not solely view crime reality programming as entertainment, but as an information source similar to the news (Oliver et al, 1998). This racialization perpetuates a Black criminal stereotype signifying all Blacks as criminal and inherently guilty, creating an othering effect where Blacks become inherently criminal and unlike the White population.<sup>3</sup> This has the potential to racially signify space. For example, neighborhood racial segregation, the fortification of White neighborhoods, and a general unwillingness on behalf of the White population to live amongst Blacks out of fear of neighborhood degradation. The racialized portrayal consistent in crime reality programming has, in recent years, had fatal consequences. The cases of Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, Eric Harris, Phillip White and others have come to media prominence

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<sup>3</sup> Racialization can be defined as the process of assigning and imposing inherent racial characteristics upon a racial minority. This process of imposing can be done through selective media representations of racial groups. Through reoccurring media portrayals of racial groups engaging in repetitive activities, racial groups may be defined as inherently susceptible, or responsible for activities deemed illegal.



and the perceived danger that has become associated with young Black males. Race in this respect has come to make particular space dangerous for the young Black population. While some may believe that we live in a “post-racial” world with the dismantling of the Jim Crow laws, the American society continues to be influenced and constructed through racial imbalances and a racial hierarchy.

Despite claims that we are living in a post-racial society, media programs such as *COPS* and *America’s Most Wanted* have been highly successful and apart of their respective networks primetime lineup. While there is no sole justification for why these programs are permitted to disseminate their respective messages, it may be accredited to societies elites’ desire for system reproduction, a mechanism to maintain White racial domination, and justification for particular policing practices (Colaguori, 2010). *COPS* has managed to air 941 episodes and counting since 1989, becoming one of Americas most notorious and viewed series to ever exist (*COPS*, 2015). Since the invention of the Television, the crime genre has been the most popular and widespread genre on TV and can be attributed for the purposes Gerbner and Gitlin argue, system reproduction. While this paper will not focus on all aspects of *COPS*, it will examine the most relevant to the issues of race and how audiences are likely to interpret the images and messages *COPS* disseminates. While not all viewers will interpret *COPS* as intended, as argued by Hall et al (1972) and Oliver et al (1998), *COPS* viewers hold particular views of race and the measures necessary to maintain law and order within the United States. This paper will examine how *COPS* serves to reinforce the racialization and criminalization of

Blacks, and the potential effects this may have on a society concerned with the effects of racialized policing in North America.<sup>4</sup>

Section I and Section II of this major research paper will provide an outline of the theories mentioned above. Section III will begin with an examination of the production of *COPS*. This will be followed by a *COPS* content analysis that examines how *COPS* over-presents Blacks as criminal suspects and Whites as police officers in comparison to reality. *COPS season 15 episode 9* is analyzed in detail showcasing the dichotomy between police interactions with Blacks and Whites. Section IV is a discussion about the implications these portrayals may have on viewers and the social effects Blacks face.

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<sup>4</sup> Criminalization can be defined as the process of defining behavior and activities as criminal and illegal.

## **Section I**

### **George Gerbner – Cultivation Theory**

Outside of personal experiences, our mental environment is assembled by groups and institutions, those involved in our lives, and the media (Surette, 1992). These influences construct our mental environment and shape what we deem to be truth. The media has been shown to shape peoples perceptions of the world around them (Reber et al, 2006). Television is one of North Americas most frequently used sources of knowledge acquisition and thus has the ability to influence a substantial number of people. When examining the relationship between media exposure and audiences' beliefs about crime, a starting point is the work by George Gerbner. Gerbner et al (1978) examined the association between watching large quantities of television and audience's perceptions about the world around them. A central perspective for studying the potential social role of TV is George Gerbner's 'cultivation theory.' For Gerbner, television constructs a social reality for viewers. Gerbner hypothesized that through television viewing, everyone comes to have a similar view of the world and one distorted from reality. Cultivation theory suggests television disseminates information about the social environment, is capable of influencing viewers' perceptions about the social world, and is perceived as an accurate representation of reality. Television has the ability to "define the world and legitimize the social order" (Gerbner, 1988. Pg. 178).

Cultivation theory is concerned with the impact of television over time and not a single exposure. Cultivation suggests there is a differing perception of reality between heavy and light viewers and that heavy viewers are more likely to believe

in a reality consistent with that portrayed on television. Individuals that frequently watch television, or heavy viewers, are more likely to internalize and accept the message portrayed to them by the media no matter how unrealistic these portrayals may be while light viewers will not. "People who watch a lot of TV see the real world as more dangerous and frightening than those who watch very little. Heavy viewers are less trustful of their fellow citizens and more fearful of the real world" (Gerbner et al, 1976. Pg. 41). As a result, heavy television viewers are more likely to apply the representation, constructions, and perceptions of the media to their individual social reality. Of course, the messages portrayed on television are not realistic or accurate representations of life however, crime reality programs work diligently to showcase media content designed to appear as realistic as possible and thus for many viewers *COPS* acts as a form of information and info-tainment (information-entertainment). It is unlikely that Gerbner would argue that watching *COPS* alone will dictate viewers' perception of race, crime, and policing (that is not something this paper wishes to suggest), however, *COPS* certainly can act as a forum of negative racial messages.

### **Cultivation Theory and *COPS***

While not all media scholars support cultivation theory, the majority still believes the media has a substantial effect and a significant influence on the social construction of the mental environment. As Surette (1998) states, "the media provide both a foundation for the public's various final images and the mortar with which the public constructs its social reality" (Surette, 1998. Pg. 96). Whether or

not the portrayals are accurate or not is less important than the interpretation and truth *COPS* appears to represent. The voyeuristic, ride-a-long nature of *COPS* provides viewers with a very believable and apparently authentic view into real policing and crime. Individuals who frequently see crime on television are therefore more likely to have amplified conceptions of crime and violence in society. Heavy viewers tend to be more fearful of crime and personal victimization than those considered light viewers of violent television, although only approximately 1% of the population becomes a victim of (the most frequently presented form of crime on television) violent crime within a given year (Gerbner et al, 1986).

As the Monk-Turner et al (2007) content analyses of *COPS* shows, violent crime committed by racial minorities is often over-represented on television in comparison to actual criminal statistics. This works to substantiate Gerbner's 'mean world syndrome' (Gerbner 1986). Violent crime has been shown to only constitute approximately 20% of reported criminal incidences, yet such crimes have been overrepresented on *COPS* and these crimes (especially those of the most violent and gruesome manner) have come to take precedence over less entertaining crimes such as DUI (O'Keefe et al. 1987). The repeated and accumulative nature of these crimes on TV has been found to subsequently impact viewers fear and conception of society and different social groups (Sparks et al, 1990. Pg. 355).

Research on undergraduate students showed that those who had personally been victims of crime believed themselves to be more vulnerable to crime in comparison to those with only indirect experiences (such as through the media) with victimization with viewing violent television. However, those with only indirect

experience perceived themselves as having a greater likelihood of being victimized after watching a violent program in comparison to those who had a first hand experience (Oliver et al, 1998). This may be explained by the fact that those that had been victimized have a better understanding of the subject matter of crime and violence. They may live with violence in their neighborhood on a daily basis and thus know why they were victimized, by whom, how to avoid victimization, and have a decreased fear of circumstances that would otherwise lead those with an indirect experience of victimization to believe that they would themselves become a victim in such a scenario.

Portrayals of Blacks on television have varied depending on the genre. Today, the frequency of Black characters is representative of the population (Zillman et al, 1975). However, depending on the genre, Blacks tend to play very different roles. In fictional programs, Blacks often appear in supportive non-stereotypical roles in comparison to Whites. In fictional programs, Blacks are rarely portrayed as criminal suspects at a rate of only 10% (Potter et al, 1993). However, Blacks play very contrasting characters in reality-based programs such as *COPS*. As Chapter three's analysis will show, Blacks are almost exclusively stereotyped and play the role of criminal. With Blacks being dis-proportionally portrayed as criminals in crime reality programs, it is reasonable to believe that *COPS* cultivates particular negative sentiments. If media content elicits fear amongst heavy, frequent viewer perceptions about the racial makeup of crime is likely impacted. In correlation with cultivation theory, crime reality programming that consistently portrays Blacks as criminal suspects is responsible for the violence viewers have

come to fear and take protective action against, reinforces racial stereotypes and increases the perception of criminal pervasiveness (Oliver et al, 1998. Pg. 30). Oliver and Armstrong (1998) conducted a study and determined that viewers who frequently watch crime reality programming have higher estimates of societal crime and believe that Blacks are responsible (Oliver et al, 1998). Crime reality programs portray an overly dangerous world, criminalized by Blacks, and are considered “realistic by many of their viewers” (Oliver et al, 1998. Pg. 30).

### **Dolf Zillman – Disposition Theory**

Dolf Zillman’s Disposition theory may shed light on why *COPS* has been and continues to be so frequently watched and successful. Disposition theory contends that viewers make subjective dispositions toward characters, and experience the most pleasure when favorable or protagonist characters have success (Zillman et al, 1975). In order to do this, viewers create ‘alliances’ based on intuitive emotional reactions with particular characters. Audiences constantly judge characters’ actions and determine what characters are ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ and whom to cheer for and against (Zillman, 2000). Characters deemed more heinous create stronger dispositions. The worse a character appears, the more gruesome or dramatic viewers wish their demise to be and vice versa. Viewers tend to find greater enjoyment when liked characters, similar to themselves are portrayed having some sort of positive outcome, and contrastingly, when disliked characters, or those characters they are unable to find any personal similarities with, experience difficulty or failure, viewer enjoyment increases (Zillman, 2000). These judgments

are morally constructed. As such, viewers operate like “untiring moral monitors,” making discretionary decision about the ethical and mistaken decisions made by characters (Zillman, 2000. Pg. 54). As a result, audiences come to like or root for characters whose actions and motivations are interpreted as right (good) and against those whose actions or motivations are deemed wrong (evil). Once viewers affirm a connection or disconnection with a character, viewers identify with their characters’ conflict or struggle and hope for their victory. The stronger this disposition, the more viewers enjoy their success/failure (Zillman, 2000). Consequently, if the outcome viewers hoped for occurs, audience enjoyment increases.

### **Disposition Theory and Criminal Suspects on *COPS***

Viewer’s experiences are intensified when dispositions are heightened. Research has found that the stronger the criminal disposition is, the stronger the audience affective disposition is upon their (usually) impending demise. Thus in crime reality programs, when criminals are seen committing more serious or heinous crimes, viewers tend to enjoy more aggressive policing or more punitive punishment (Oliver et al, 1998). Audience members with an amplified fear or loath of criminals should enjoy crime reality programs such as *COPS* that have high police arrest rates/cases with a successful conclusion. The content analysis of *COPS* will show that the program over represents minorities as criminal, Whites as police officers, an over frequency of police successfully capturing their suspect and thus according to disposition theory, viewers should obtain a great deal of satisfaction.



The consistent portrayal of 'good' White police officers, and predominately racial minorities as 'bad' criminal suspects, should elicit a dislike for young Blacks. Studies have shown viewers that frequently watch and enjoy crime reality programming have higher levels of racism, authoritarianism, and punitiveness (Oliver et al, 1998. Pg. 31). These studies also show that viewers enjoyed more authoritarian styles of policing when the criminal suspect was Black. However, that same enjoyment is not carried over when the suspect is White(Oliver et al, 1998. Pg. 31). Thus, the portrayal of race on crime reality programs does have an effect on viewer enjoyment and partially explains *COPS* popularity. Not only do viewers enjoy watching evil characters fail and conquered by police, but also because *COPS* portrays authoritarian policing practices on criminal suspects who audiences' hold negative racial biases towards. Thus *COPS* does not necessarily convert nonbelievers into believers, but rather preachers to its choir. As a result, this enjoyment should lead to consistent heavy viewership, and heighten audience perceptions of the prevalence of crime within society, specifically by Blacks. Thus, *COPS* popularity is in a circular like relationship between enjoyment and viewer beliefs from the portrayal of Black criminal suspects.

Consistent exposure to Blacks being arrested and beaten by police can create particular racial attitudes and heightened racism, which then leads to, increased levels of viewer enjoyment. This has obvious consequences with consideration to cases such as Rodney King where because of consistent Black criminal portrayals; the Black body becomes inherently dangerous and assumed to have done something morally wrong (a point that will be explored in much further depth).

Simultaneously, imagery of the Black body failing or being unsuccessful may become a source of pleasure in the minds of audiences not only on television, but in actuality. Further, in cases such as police interactions with African-Americans, it may become psychologically unfulfilling and unthinkable to find an officer in the wrong when their dealings with Black criminal suspects has developed into a sport and competition to be won by the heroic police officer. Thus, viewers of *COPS* may come to simply enjoy the shackling and defeat of the Black soul. To conclude, what does this tell us about our entertainment? What does it say when we have come to expect evil upon a group of people? And what does it say when we have come to derive pleasure off their blood?

### **POLICING THE CRISIS:**

Hall et al's *Policing the Crisis* (1978; 2013) explored the mythology that serves and amplifies moral panics and perceptions of fear, violence, and threat (Hall et al, 1978). Through the examination of news coverage of mugging, Hall et al outline the deep structure of what mugging came to signify in British culture during the 1970's. As Hall (1978) contends, media discourses can become catalysts for social change. For Hall et al (1978), the media has the ability to create moral panics through the discursive portrayal of events. For Britain, the media coverage of mugging created a moral panic about youth and immigration/racial other within British society. The media however, are not solely responsible for creating societal moral panics. Through the media and police, employment, street crime, and Caribbean youths wove together creating an image of the Black mugger and molded it into a symbol

for the inner-city, youth, crime, and an undesirable social and political situation (Hall et al, 1978). This moral panic led to the Black mugger becoming a symbol for all that was wrong with British society. As such, without this imagery, more authoritarian policing of Black communities would likely not have been able to take place if it were not for this new found public consent of how the police and state should deal with this criminal minority other. As Hall et al (2013) outline, the media took a central role in constructing social knowledge of street crime and the 'mugger.' The mugger became a cultural figure with street crime becoming a racialized practice. The mugger, came to have a figurative existence and created a new common sense understanding that the police needed to be more authoritarian when dealing with racialized peoples, specifically Blacks. Through this discourse, the young Black male became the central figure of the problem of urban street crime and the main reason for the implementation of measures necessary to maintain law and order and a crime control model of criminal justice. This dominant discourse led to a series of firmer laws to deal with racialized crime, such as harsher and mandatory sentences justifiably in the interest of public safety and the fear that violent crime was increasing (Hall et al, 1978). Public support for more aggressive methods of control rose with the perception that the Black mugger needed to be controlled for the betterment of society. Public campaigns had a racial tone with 'police versus Blacks' becoming a stock sentiment of the mugging crisis. With this newfound common sense and perception of crime, the media overemphasized the phenomena of Blacks and crime. Blacks and street crime were often portrayed on television maintaining viewer understandings of race and crime. Thus, Blackness

became a racialized 'other' and commonsensically different than the rest of British society.

***POLICING THE CRISIS AND COPS:***

Policing the Crisis has a number of parallels with the current understandings of Blacks and crime. Arguably, the 1970's acted as the birthplace for the association between Blacks and crime as commonsensically understood today. *COPS* may act as yet another medium for the dissemination and justification for authoritarian policing practices towards young Black males we see currently. *COPS* acts as a disseminator that serves and amplifies moral panics surrounding victimization, violence, and racialized peoples (See Gerbner). The portrayal of racialized peoples on *COPS* perpetuates a moral panic surrounding the apparent frequency of crime within society and the inherent criminal activity of racialized people. While crime rates (although problematic) at face value, appear to be on the decline (Statistics Canada, 2015). Levels of fear, violence, and crime continue to be reoccurring political issues. The constant portrayal of African-Americans on *COPS* as criminal suspects perpetuates the association between Blacks and crime and increases the apparent frequency of crime within society. Regardless, crime remains an important political issue. Despite African Americans not being responsible for the majority of reported offences, they continue to headline a so-called societal problem. While 'White-collar' crime is a reoccurring offence, it does not garner nearly the same media attention as street crime. Black street crime symbolically represents all that is wrong with society today. Whether it be the decay of the inner-city, rampant drug

use and societal addiction/decay, or the inability to go outside and feel safe at night Black youths continue to be recognized as a threat to society and inhibiting social advancement.

### **ENCODING/DECODING: A Model for Analysis**

Stuart Hall (1972) argues that news content must be both original and familiar. This exposes audiences to the dominate ideology of society (Hall et al, 1972. Pg. 57). Because crime is newsworthy and reasserts the values of society, media messages tend to be consistent with Hall et al (1972) *Encoding/Decoding*; the dominant ideology mode. The dominant ideology model is the ideology shared by the majority of people within a society. They become the dominant class. The dominant classes hold a common set of values and beliefs and become the dominant view within society. For Hall, the media presents messages that are decoded in different ways depending on the audiences' cultural background, economic status, and personal experiences (Hall, 1972). Audience members' individual characteristics shape how they interpret, or decode media messages (Hall, 1972). The power is therefore in the audiences', or as Hall labels, the decoders,' and not the encoders. However, over time repeated exposure to particular content over powers audiences' ability to decode messages beyond their encoded meaning. Hall's four-stage model of communication (production, circulation, use, and reproduction) explains how messages are interpreted.

During the stage of production, the encoder (*COPS* producers for example) uses their personal experiences (and the specific program constraints) to code meaning to adhere to the dominant ideology. This is done by including

information/footage that is consistent with normalized notions of crime and race. The message is then circulated either visually or in written format. The format alters how the media message is interpreted/decoded. Consistent with Gerbner, written text and visual imagery have a different effect on viewers (Gerbner, 1986). Through use/consumption, audiences interpret media message based off their social context and position. Upon interpretation, audiences will either take action or not based off how they have interpreted the message. In Hall's scheme, "each stage will affect the message (or 'product') being conveyed as a result of its 'discursive form' (e.g. practices, instruments, relations). This implies that, for example, the sender of information can never be sure that it will be perceived by the target audience in the way that was intended, because of this chain of discourse" (Hall, 1972). The audience, according to Hall will accept the dominant/hegemonic message as it is intended to be interpreted, reject the message, or negotiate the interpretation by accepting and rejecting particular elements. However, in order for audience members to reject or negotiate the dominant media message, they must have sufficient subject knowledge and the motivation to do so. Viewers with similar personal biases as the coder are likely to decode the message as designed. It is very likely that the majority of *COPS* viewers will adopt the dominant hegemonic position because, the primary audience of *COPS* hold heightened levels of racism and support for aggressive authoritarian policing practices (Oliver et al, 1998. Pg. 31). Thus this 'preaching to the choir' is likely to result in viewers interpreting the messages in *COPS* as they were designed to be (see Zillman).

**ENCODING/DECODING AND *COPS*:**

Originally, *COPS* targeted audience was White males between the ages of 18-35. *COPS* successfully attracted this demographic which came to form the programs primary audience. Because this demographic was the targeted audience, they are likely to hold views consistent with the dominant ideology of the program and thereby decode the messages as encoded and hoped by the *COPS* production team. Therefore, *COPS* dominant audience is going to interpret messages of Blacks being responsible for crime, and Whites as heroic police officers and the sole protectors of law and order within society. Consistent with Zillman, this audience will interpret events through the perspective of the police and should hold heightened levels of racism, authoritarian policing practices, and support racial profiling. Without having sufficient knowledge of crime, the majority of viewers is unlikely to reject the coded meaning and will endorse either the dominant meaning or the negotiated. Only a select few will have the racial and criminal knowledge and interest to reject the dominant/hegemonic message. Consistent with Zillman, viewers experience pleasure when 'good' characters experience triumph. As a result, audiences are likely to increasingly interpret young Black males as dangerous and an evil of society. The Black criminal stereotype should become more prominent and increasingly accessible to be primed and activated by viewers in the real world. Therefore, the majority of *COPS* viewers will interpret *COPS* in the dominant ideological fashion and thus *COPS* producers have little reason to fear that the messages they continue to disseminate will be misinterpreted.

Some viewers may watch *COPS* and understand that it is highly edited or not to take what they see seriously, some may take it as an inside look into policing through an edited lens, while others may take *COPS* at face value and use it as an informative type of entertainment. The editing is designed to make it appear as natural, real, and unedited as possible, and thus, many viewers are likely to take it as an authentic look into crime and policing.

These Theoretical models provide a platform to understand how *COPS* may be interpreted, why viewers may tune in, how *COPS* may influence viewers, and how viewers perceptions may be altered.



## **Section II:**

This section will further examine theoretical models relevant to the content of *COPS* and how it may work for system reproduction.

### **HEGEGMONY**

According to theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971), hegemony is the ruling classes ideological domination of subordinated classes through the dissemination, elaboration, and penetration of ideology molded into common sense understandings (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony unites dominant ideas of persuasion with the subordinated classes consent (Simon, 1982). As Strinati states,

“dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the ‘spontaneous consent’ of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated peoples. (Strinati, 1995. Pg. 165)

The dominant class controls the limits and boundaries of societal ideology and what is thinkable. Most importantly, hegemonic ideology infiltrates societies common sense and how individuals come to understand the world around them (Simon, 1982).

### **TODD GITLIN AND THE MEDIA**

In *Prime Time ideology* (1979), Todd Gitlin argues that the ruling classes ideology is disseminated through media outlets such as television. According to Gitlin (1980), the media uphold the dominant ideology and those in power by maintaining certain journalistic practices. Through perspective, genre, commercials, setting, and character types, dominant ideological processes of hegemony are maintained. According to Gitlin (1979), current social and political conflicts structure television content (Gitlin, 1979). The media attempts to depict the current

societal ideology and values. For example, society endorsed a crime control model of law enforcement in the 1980's, which led to the birth of law and order crime reality programs such as *COPS* and *America's Most Wanted*. Through the use of stereotypical and alternative characters, television legitimizes or delegitimizes viewpoints and values and the opinion of its audience. Genre maintains ideology through providing content that appeals to the highest spending audience. Genres predominantly showcase the societal mood and understandings. In sports for example, broadcasters transmit ideology by not only giving the viewer a particular viewpoint of the action, but help the viewer interpret the action in a specific way. For Gitlin, commercials work to unite people as consumers in a market capitalist economy. Instead of focusing on important social issues, commercials interrupt our lives and have us focus on how we can make our lives more comfortable. Through commercials, we willingly consent to the ideology and messages they disseminate into our daily lives. Finally, the setting and character types of television intentionally depict success, glamour, people, and things we (apparently should) aspire to in a capitalist society (Gitlin, 1979). Programs such as *COPS*, gives working class/inferior people, screen time, in order to create a sense of superiority and support for the values, desires, and accomplishments of the upper classes. While journalists and program producers do not consciously consider this ideology when making decisions, by simply doing their jobs, they tend to serve and maintain the ideology of the economic and political elite. While the media is free to disseminate what they chose, it is imperative they do not violate essential hegemonic values or become too sympathetic to alternative viewpoints (Gitlin, 1979). While such

ideological invasions are not unavoidable, viewers must employ resistance measures such as Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding scheme in order to make sound, objective decisions.

### **HEGEMONY AND *COPS* IMAGERY:**

For Gitlin, the media are unknowingly controlled by corporate and political elites such as Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch, one of the wealthiest people alive, has on multiple occasions had his media outlets accused of being amongst the least ethical. The media frame the dissemination of particular ideological subjects within the dominant classes understanding of how to perpetuate elite domination. Thus for Murdoch, his outlets content predominantly portrays characters similar to himself or his interests positively. In the case of *COPS*, all of the material is edited ensuring the police are not portrayed in a negative fashion. The show appears realistic through the shaking camera, giving the impression of a controlled chaos (Cavender, 1998. Pg. 91). In this instance, police action is designed to help maintain an ideology; that the police are inherently good. The police being a predominantly White institution, and the overwhelming majority of police officers on *COPS* being White, naturalize positive associations for the White race. Here Whiteness is ideologically constructed as hegemonically superior to Black culture that is in need of being controlled/surveilled. Stereotypical characters have stock roles, journeys, and outcomes. This naturalizes and makes particular actions expected and stereotypical, for example, the Black criminal. Meanwhile, victims resemble the White viewer. When police come across a crime scene, Black males are naturally going to be seen

as guilty as it has become common sense to understand the relation between Blacks and crime. Thus *COPS* works to exhibit Black inferiority, how they threaten Whites, and societies need for police to fend off the Black threat.

Cultural hegemony looks to answer questions and disseminate a positive ending even if one does not actually exist. This supports the current system by making it appear as though it is effective and working for the betterment of society. The over-proportionate arrest rate by police officers on *COPS*, appeals to audiences' desire for a conclusion. The over-proportionate arrest rate relays and reproduces an ideology that becomes natural and thereby justifies policing practices such as racial profiling. As *COPS* portrays, the suspect is more often than not, Black. Thus, skin color becomes a form of evidence. Every Black person is guilty because that is natural and common sense. There is less need for due process, as racial profiling should sufficiently catch criminals. As Stuart Hall contends, the media must produce something that is both familiar but fresh. Appealing to this popular, preferred outcome, the media is able to reproduce preexisting social relations, maintain racial hierarchy, and provide support for a crime control focused criminal justice system.

### **Roland Barthes and Mythology**

Roland Barthes' (1957) *Mythologies* dissects the functioning of particular myths. For Barthes, (1957), dominant institutions, like the media, work to create societal beliefs that the current system is natural. Through the portrayal of stereotypical, commonsensical understandings, media material becomes natural and obvious. For Barthes, all ways of seeing are socially constructed through signs

and are not objectively natural. This is usually completed by reducing multifaceted phenomena to a few traits designed to be taken as definitive. Barthes uses the example of a Basque chalet in Paris. The chalet displays and contains certain components of Basque style, however, ignores other components that would otherwise be seen in the French countryside.

The way images are portrayed as natural is itself a social construction. Unlike other signifiers, myths are motivated and distort particular images to carry certain meanings. Myths work to remove the readers need to construct meanings and interpret. Myths are designed to be received rather than read. This requires only certain ideological knowledge to be understood and recognized. Audiences do not see this construction or mold as a myth, but simply the image being signified.

Barthes centrally focuses on how myth removes history from discourse. For Barthes (1957), "The very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature" (pg. 129). It thus tears away specificity and richness, emptying reality of the appearance of history to turn it into something else full of a different meaning and construction. This emptying becomes a type of filling. What the myth now carries appears eternal and absolute implanting an entire history and perspective. This myth is designed to speak to a specific audience, by referencing race or class stereotypes. The power of myth lies in its ability to make the subject matter appear completely natural. As Barthes contends, myth is "driven to having either to unveil or to liquidate the concept, it will naturalize it" (Barthes, 1957. Pg. 129). Myth makes certain aspects appear absolute, natural, or eternal. As a result of myth, people are drowned into a false constructed nature.

However, as Barthes outlines in his essay on professional wrestling, audiences are not necessarily solely interested in knowing that the battle is fixed, but the grand nature of visual spectacle. Unlike other agonistic battles, the audience is absolutely clear about what to expect. For Barthes the purpose of the wrestler is not to win, but “it is to go through the motions which are expected of him” (Barthes, 1957. Pg. 16). Who the crowd should cheer for is obvious through dress, prefight music, and the physical body. Characters come out in satanic costumes while others come out as theatrical patriotic heroes. The supposed villain is generally the sufferer in wrestling. His attacks are designed to symbolically represent who he is as a person “his treacheries, cruelties and acts of cowardice” are played out in an agonistic spectacle (Barthes, 1957. Pg. 17). For Barthes defeat and justice are parallel concepts. Defeat is not a resolution, but a spectacle. Defeat of the villain “is purely moral concept: that of justice” (Barthes, 1957. Pg. 21). The loser must deserve the punishment he receives, which is why the crowd accepts rules being broken as long as it is just and presented the way it is and should be.

### **Barthes and *COPS***

Barthes central principle of myth and its ability to naturalize has a number of ramifications for *COPS* and race. *COPS* use of stereotypical characteristics for criminal suspects, makes the portrayal seem completely normal. The stereotypical content leaves little for the audience to interpret. The show delivers exactly what is expected. In doing so, the ‘us and them’ ideology is further supported. Audiences are not surprised by who is committing crime. The lower classes’ apparent

susceptibility naturalizes the notion that the White middle-upper classes are naturally superior. Members of such demographic are simply placed where they fit.

Finally, all prior Black civil history and larger socio-political contexts that may affect criminal susceptibility are largely ignored. Rather, areas with high criminality are portrayed as a coincidental gathering. All criminals seem to simply congregate in spaces and live amongst each other. Like wild animals, they are expected to stay within these spaces and *COPS* acts as a voyeuristic gaze into an uncivilized community. Crime becomes an inherent biological characteristic that has infected the lot and thus criminal behavior becomes a normal occurrence police officers can expect to find when dealing with such populations. However, this is a result of *COPS* selective representation of Blackness and crime. Crime regularly takes place throughout society yet it appears as though crime only occurs on the streets of the poor inner city. Corporate crime is not considered entertaining enough unless they recklessly drive through the streets in their Audi A4.

*COPS* and professional wrestling hold a number of similarities. The audience knows the resolution they will see. However, it is not about the final resolution, but the spectacle of how we get there. There's a reason why so much of *COPS* content is tossed (besides the lack of entertainment). *COPS* creates a spectacle of law enforcement where the roles are inherently obvious and the process is nothing more than a moral spectacle of good prevailing over evil. Suspects are presumed guilty as evidence is purposively stacked against them in order to leave little doubt. Thus, their defeat is just, and if police need to bend rules to accomplish such, so be it, for if they are not, society is allegedly doomed to collapse.

## **Agonism and the Mediagion**

Claudio Colaguori's (2012), *Agon Culture: Competition, Conflict and the Problem of Domination*, examines agonism (conflict) through reification and the positive aspects such as growth and progress. For Colaguori (2012), agonism promotes social conflict and domination. Through the media, the dominant ideology of society is disseminated (Colaguori, 2012). Like Adorno and Foucault, Colaguori contends that agonism justifies domination, normalization, and naturalization of conflict as part of an ideology to substantiate dominance and suppression. This agonistic ideology has become adopted by the cultural industry through the dissemination of conflict and domination through the 'mediagion' (Colaguori, 2012). Through the mediagion, agonistic premises celebrate competition and works to normalize military definitions of reality. This creates hierarchies with social characteristics, such as race and class, become bases for exclusion. Here, the cultural ideology of agnoism creates a rationality supporting domination (Colaguori, 2012).

For Colaguori (2012), the mediagion has become the new Roman Coliseum (Colaguori, 2012). There is a public fascination with the mythology of 'good vs. evil' presented on TV with good prevailing through (justified) violent means. This is central to the mediagion as the public yearns for heroes to cheer and idolize and figures to despise and ridicule. The societal obsession with violence promotes ideas of authoritarian control and empowerment. Through reification, (White) viewers become empowered with the destruction and defeat of 'evil' (Black). Viewers relate



to their noble values and through their triumph over evil, become empowered and fascinated with such domination.

The crime genre has come to dominate network television and film (Colaguori, 2012). Justice is portrayed as a form of revenge where good is able to rightfully punish and make right. This is also seen in daily news through war and debates surrounding capital punishment. The destruction of enemy states both encourages and legitimates violent political control that becomes articulated as normal and necessary for system reproduction and national security. Colaguori believes crime shows reproduce state juridical discourses to persuade viewers into supporting the police and law and order (Colaguori, 2012). The pre-acknowledged protagonist (police officer) follows media narratives and expectations, creating viewer subjective pleasure upon the dispensing of justice. The crime genre is full of conflict between suspect and the criminal system. With each new twist and turn, the conflict thickens or changes. Whether its "*Suits*" Harvey Specter having his evidence deemed inadmissible or a police officer chasing a fleeing suspect through town, the story is centered around conflict. In the end, the story has a successful resolution, but not before building up audience anxiety and emotional investment. The conflicts resolution is consistent with this notion of revenge and the satisfaction of making right. However difficult, the protagonist finds a successful outcome that pleases audiences with a happy ending. *COPS* is deeply entrenched in the crime genre, where Colaguori's points on agonism and his conception of the mediagion become increasingly relevant.

### **Agonism, the Mediagion, and *COPS***

The concept of agonism and the mediagion are prominently found in both *COPS* and the crime reality genre. *COPS* showcases and pits White police officers against Black criminal suspects in a battle of cat and mouse on the battlefield of America's streets. Criminal suspects are like game for officers to hunt down, subdue, and demonstrate their dominance over. It's not a matter of 'if' the police will catch their suspects, but when. *COPS* central focus is on police officers and their ability to apprehend suspected criminals. The police very obviously play the role of good protagonist, while suspects are evil antagonists. The police are pitted against suspects in a battle of wits and hide and seek. Suspects are like game hoping to escape from police capture. Overly successful police 'make right' and get revenge on suspects through arrest and explanation of the charges they are set to face. Although *COPS* claims that all suspects are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law, the spectacle of suspects running from the law and later placed in the back of police cruisers stamps defendants guilt in the mind of viewers. Simultaneously, this spectacle of hunter and game is one of conflict.

As Colaguori (2012) mentions, agonism has potential effects for social characteristics such as race (Colaguori, 2012). The portrayal of violence and agonism towards racial suspects work to justify police practices such as racial profiling because it becomes normal and a way to maintain racial domination necessarily to protect law and order. Such conflict is pleasurable to viewers because it reaffirms what they already know and asserts their inherent superiority.

Portrayals of a criminal demographic justify White political domination and the suppression of Black social rights.

Consistent with Colaguori (2012), *COPS* ride along presentation style encourages viewers to see vignettes from the police perspective and thus side with police. Hearing from police officers as both a collective and as individuals allows officers the opportunity to justify and mold the viewer's interpretations. Suspects are limited in their ability to speak to the camera and when they are, it is more for voyeuristic perp walk purposes.

### **Power of Stereotypes:**

The notion that Blacks are more likely to be prone to violence and criminal activity is one of the most frequently popular stereotypes about African-Americans. It is commonly understood that group stereotypes can effect an individual's perceptions, attributions about, expectations, and behavior towards members of that group beneath conscious awareness (Goff et al, 2012. Pg. 62). This is especially true when one lacks the knowledge to overcome 'gut' instincts and biases. Research suggests that it is not necessary for individuals to hold explicitly racist beliefs to be susceptible to racist perceptions (Goff et al, 2012. Pg.60). Racially discriminatory beliefs can exist without conscious bigotry- racism without being racist. This happens because our mind makes automatic associations to simplify the constant bombardment of images, meanings, and values we experience on a daily basis (Goff et al, 2012. Pg.60). These automatic associations save our brain time, and associate terms with one another - such as 'car' with 'gas.' We often experience the two terms together and thereby our brains associated one with the other (Goff et al, 2012. Pg.

60). This remains true with stereotypes. 'Black' has become synonymous with 'crime' and studies have shown that thinking of 'crime' can lead individuals to be more alert to Black faces than White faces (Goff et al, 2012. Pg.60).

Studies have suggested that it may be possible to control the use of stereotypes in certain circumstances. One of these control factors is motivation. Those that endorse stereotypes will be motivated to apply them, while those that reject, attempt to avoid them/make their own desertions when making judgments (Dixon et al, 2005). However, because COPS tends to 'preach to the choir,' it seems unlikely that audiences would do such.

The negative associations created by stereotypes (such as Blacks and criminal activity) results in us expecting the worst, or for them to fit the stereotype. Stereotype consistent information is more memorable than information inconsistent with the stereotype (Allport et al, 1947). We make stereotype consistent profiles for individual behavior, and as a result treat them in a stereotypical ways (ie. as a criminal (Eberhardt et al, 2008.)). Studies have further shown that we are far more likely to remember information consistent with stereotypes than information inconsistent with a stereotype. As a result, stereotypes become difficult to break, mainly because information that contradicts the stereotype is likely to be dismissed (Goff et al, 2012. Pg.62). Unlike attitudes towards increased racial equality, the association between Blacks and criminality has not changed, as stereotypes tend to be resilient. (Schuman et al. 1997). Deterring stereotypical perceptions and thoughts has proven to be inherently difficult. Trying to not think of the stereotype tends to cognitively produce thoughts

and images of the exact stereotype we are attempting to suppress making them accessible, both presently and in the future.

The question remains whether or not Blacks are stereotypically perceived as violent or criminal. A study conducted by Smith (1990), found that respondents felt Blacks were more violent prone than any other racial category (Smith, 1990). For example, 52% of Whites rated Blacks as a six or higher on a one-ten scale of violence or aggressiveness (Sniderman and Piazza, 1993, Pg. 45). Out of five provided stereotypes, 'aggressiveness and Accordingly, 'violent' was the most reoccurring recognized Black stereotype (Sniderman and Piazza, 1993, Pg. 45).

### **Potential Effects of Stereotypes**

Content studies have shown that Blacks are most frequently associated with crime more than any other race in crime reality programs (Oliver, 1994).

"Inaccurate information from the mass media or other sources may also contribute to persistent stereotypes" (Reinarman et al, 1989) (Hurwitz et al, 1997). Therefore, heavy television viewers should have increased exposure to the overrepresentation of Blacks as criminals. The priming of a stereotype is likely to have a short-term influence on decision-making. Meanwhile, the accumulative representation of Blacks and criminality is likely to transform the information within a stereotype, into intuitive cognitive understanding. "The activation of stereotypes suggests that a stereotype can be primed by exposure to the relevant social category and then influences subsequent judgments without the perceiver's conscious awareness."

(Devine, 1989) (Fazio et al, 1995) (Givens et al, 2005). Theoretically, every exposure

to a Black committing a crime should activate and strengthen the stereotype and association between Blacks and crime. Therefore, heavy crime reality television viewers should be more likely than light television viewers to believe in the association between Blacks and crime and attributes of Gerbner et al's mean world syndrome. As Quillian argues, "a combination of negative media depictions of African-Americans, historical stereotypes, and ethnocentric biases are likely combined to form distorted perceptions in which the association of blackness and criminality is systemically overestimated" (Quillian et al, 2002. Pg. 722)

According to Power (1996), the activation of a stereotype by priming increases the probability that the knowledge within the stereotype will be used to alter ensuing judgments (Power et al, 1996). Further, research has shown that black stereotypes are automatically activated upon (viewer) exposure to relevant behavior or features associated with that stereotype. This would include dress, speech, and general mannerisms (Bargh et al., 1996). Upon activation, these stereotypes are ready for use. According to Devine (1989), regardless of personal beliefs, stereotypes can be activated simply by any kind of stimuli (such as seeing an African American being portrayed as a criminal suspect) (Devine, 1989). Given the accumulated and increasing numbers of Blacks as criminal suspects on television, cognitively it should become easier to believe the black criminal stereotype. Each instance makes the association easier to endorse and accept as reality (Devine, 1989). Meaning, the more African-Americans are portrayed as young Black criminals, the easier it is for the brain to activate this stereotype even when not primed. As Fiske and Taylor (2013), Devine (1989), and Bargh (1996) argue, the

frequent activation of a stereotype may lead to automatic use and chronic activation outside of the individual's conscious awareness (Devine, 1989) (Fiske et al 2013) (Higgins et al 1996).

Stereotypes have the ability to influence people's perception about the environment around them. While individuals do not need to be explicitly racist to employ stereotypes, simply being aware of them is sufficient to alter a social conscious. The consistent showcase of Black criminals on COPS further primes and activates the Black criminal stereotype. COPS predictability works to cement the Black criminal as not just a stereotype, but also an embedded, natural, cultural understanding of crime. Studies suggests that racial stereotypes have created the conditions where Black suspects are more likely to accidentally be shot than Whites in simulated 'shooters' and for their personal belongings to mistakenly be identified as weapons (Correll et al, 2002). This has lead to an over proportionate number of fatal police shootings of Blacks and a widespread cultural hyperactivity to Black suspicion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fatal police shootings occur at a rate of nearly three per day – with Blacks twenty-one times more likely to be fatally shot than Whites (Gabrielson et al, 2014). In a study by Correll et al (2002) police officers were found to be more likely to misidentify objects such as guns, and mistakenly shoot Black suspects in comparison to Whites (Correll et al, 2002). Presuming that the majority of police officers are not explicitly racist in their views, the awareness of stereotypes is all that is required to infiltrate and influence one's actions. This suggests that stereotypes have the potential to alter people's social consciousness and decision-making.

## **SECTION III**

### **HISTORY OF CRIME AND MEDIA**

The reality television program *COPS*, is one of cable TV's longest running programs. As TV has progressed, real instances of crime and policing being recorded and broadcasted on TV have become increasingly more frequent. In the past, it was rare that any form of television would feature any 'real' footage. Crime was based on spoken word following an event and covered by news journalists. The news reporter gave the audience a run-down about the incident and the policing reaction. The police station, courthouse, or crime scene may have acted as the backdrop; however, it was unusual to have footage of the incident in question (Doyle, 2003. Pg. 5). More recently, actual footage has more commonly found its way onto broadcast TV. In the majority of cases, footage is not 'live,' when dramatic 'live' material is available or occurring, it becomes breaking news and the channel's central focus. Recently, there has been an increase in actuality footage which can be attributed to a number of factors; increasing prevalence of video footage available for use by alternative sources such as CCTV and cellphones, the increased popularity of reality television and the appeal of being visible on media. With the continued merging of TV, Internet, and social media, the frequency of actuality footage is only likely to increase.

Crime is one of the most prominent focuses of actuality footage. Since the 1960's, crime and justice situations have become increasingly popular from civil right demonstrations to police controlling crowds. In the 1970's it became increasingly popular for public demonstrations to use television as an outlet to



bring further awareness towards protests and injustices. With the growing prominence of personal video recorders and surveillance cameras, the 1980's showcased an increasing number of authentic, 'live' occurrences of crime and policing (Doyle, 2003.). With a formidable writers strike taking place in 1988, the late 1980's saw the birth of a various inexpensive 'crime reality programs' such as *COPS* where 'real' policing was recorded and appeared to give the world its most authentic, truthful, and accurate portrayal of policing and who was committing crime within society (Jaffe, 2005). *COPS* instantly grew popular, debuting in March 1989 to record ratings and critical acclaim. For much of the 1990's *COPS* stood as the highest rated reality TV show (Doyle, 2003. Pg. 32). The program received four Emmy Award nominations and won the inaugural American Television Award for best reality program (Doyle, 2003. Pg. 32). *COPS* became the first crime reality program to use actual footage instead of reenactments. No professional actors are used. The only explicitly visible signs of production is the program opening when the *InnerCircle* song 'Bad Boys' plays over the imagery of police officers busting down doors, aiming their guns, tackling fleeing suspects, and shining a light on an otherwise violent society.

### **THE PRODUCTION OF *COPS***

The production of *COPS* is relatively simple, a video and sound team follow around an on duty police officer effectively doing away with high priced actors. Part of the *COPS* success is the relatively inexpensive nature of each episode. The lighting is never perfect, the angle is always slightly off, at times the most dramatic moments

have occurred before the crew is even on scene; *COPS* is cheap to produce. One episode of *COPS* costs around \$200,000 to construct, start to finish (Fishman, 1998 Pg. 67). In comparison to many other popular half-hour programs such as *Friends*; \$5.5 million, *Arrested Development*; \$3 million, for production companies, *COPS* can be extremely profitable (Magder, 2004. Pg. 139). *COPS*, and the entire reality TV genre, create the voyeuristic feel through having people portray themselves, in a real, working environment, without an official script, and for the purpose of audience entertainment and in turn, far cheaper to produce in comparison to comedies or dramatic scripted programs. (Siano, 2008. Pg. 176).

Unlike many other forms of media, *COPS* has a particular timeless quality. Besides time markers that occasionally flash on the bottom of the screen, the audience is given no explicit indication of when the episode was filmed. The only indicators viewers are able to pick up on are the varying camera quality, dress, cars, and grooming of the programs characters. Each episode follows the same itinerary with footage edited down to three vignettes of incidents on a given officers shift. An episode filmed in 1993, is made to be just as entertaining as an episode filmed in 2015. This makes all 941, and counting, *COPS* episodes suitable for syndication. According to John Langley, *COPS* creator and executive producer, the program is designed to be a 'ride-along' where curious civilians are able to imagine themselves in a police cruiser to live out a police officers shift (Fetveit, 1999. Pg.792).

Even with new episodes being aired, *COPS* continued to be one of Fox's most influential and popular programs; broadcasted an average of twelve times per week (Doyle, 1998. Pg. 96). While this may appear as an innocent statistic, it has a number

of potential consequences. While much of Americans and Canadians may have little understanding of crime, the frequent broadcast of *COPS* has the ability to influence a great number of people. *COPS* has filmed in over one hundred and forty American cities meaning that *COPS* provides an overall showcase of policing and crime in The United States (*COPS Official Website*, 2015). This allows for the repetition of particular themes (such as racism or Blacks as responsible for crime). Thus, depending on how *COPS* portrays crime and policing, viewers may acquire a particular understanding of crime in particular areas and American cities. This selective portrayal brings 'real' and potentially violent policing to areas that had never been exposed before. This may give off the impression that crime is, and could happen anywhere and thus make crime appear to be a larger societal problem. However, *COPS* footage rarely takes place in middle-class suburbia, suggesting that the majority of street crime is committed away from middle to upper class neighborhoods and that criminals are unlikely to be from this economic class. Thus, varying racial demographics, the composition of characters (suspect and officer) should accurately portray a wide variety of differing demographics and predominantly White suspects and police officers.

While *COPS* claims to be an unscripted and raw look at police work, it is admittedly not so. Langley stated "reality is often ironically difficult to capture because it is unstructured, unpredictable, and unscripted" (Doyle, 1998. Pg 98) Langley further admits that *COPS* undergoes a considerable amount of processing before being ready for broadcast. "I can't think of anything specific to better portray police work -however the editors do want the exciting calls on the show. Maybe if

they tried to show that 90% of the job is riding around – with only 10% possible being sheer terror – it might be more realistic” (Hallet et al, 1995. Pg. 114). Each twenty-two minute episode is edited down from fifty or sixty hours of film, the program appears to simply record incidents taking place immediately following one another with officers risking life and limb minute after minute. As one officer explained, “as I mentioned, most of the footage they shot was canned...and most importantly anything we didn’t want kept on tape had to be erased – that was the deal – and each officer could have erased whatever he wanted to have erased.” (Hallet et al, 1995. Pg. 114). Despite *COPS* apparent rawness, the footage goes through a very thorough production process before it is broadcasted.

The process begins with production in the field with producer Bert Van Munster and his staff of cameramen and soundmen and support staff; and then it comes back to post-production with supervising producers Murray Jordan and his editorial staff. All the material comes back to Los Angeles, with the field staff tagging what looks like potential stories. Then our editorial staff cuts then most interesting material, where upon I determine what goes in the shows after re-cutting or re-finessing if needed. Basically we try to put together interesting combinations. For example, an action piece (which hooks the audience), a lyrical piece (which develops more emotion), and a think piece (which provokes thought on the part of the audience). There has been a great deal of study if how the media may shape the views of its audience. (Doyle, 1998. Pg 98)

Despite the authentic police work *COPS* appears to show, the program is designed like many of the fictional crime stories seen in *CSI* or the *First 48*. Not every vignette on *COPS* is action packed, many of the vignettes that involve police chases and takedowns involves Blacks, and vice versa; many of the more mundane vignettes include innocent White citizens and their struggle with issues out of their control.

### ***COPS* and Naturalization**

Aaron Doyle's notion of *COPS* as 'reality fiction' provides a convincing argument of how *COPS* should be understood. 'Reality fiction' suggests the selective representation of *COPS* is an edited, bias, constructed version of reality (however, this would obviously remain consistent with all reality programming) (Doyle, 2003. Pg. 34). "There is obviously no way we would have agreed to the cameras in the cruisers without having full editorial control over the footage" (Hallett et al, 1995. Pg. 116). However, the appeal of *COPS* remains the actuality footage it appears to showcase. While daily news programs legitimize their stories through knowledgeable sources and the discourse they are discursively authorized to speak with, *COPS* only does so in a limited and complimentary way. *COPS* claim to authenticity and realism is almost entirely based on the (supposedly) minimally edited visual. Seeing is believing for the *COPS* audience (however, to believe is to understand only a single perspective of police work. The full editorial control afforded to police suggests that police are unwilling to showcase the whole story of police work and crime). The audience is meant to feel as though they are right there in the cruiser. While the crew ask the officer questions, or at least encourage the officer to speak about him/herself, their work, who is committing crime, where crime is occurring, why crime is occurring, etc. etc. there is no explicit prodding or line of questioning. It is straight from the horses mouth and thus the discourse is legitimized through the officers position and accepted knowledge authorized by his badge. The media crew appears to just be in the car without having given the officer any instruction of how to perform. The presentation of this 'actuality' consequentially naturalizes the

footage. From the very opening, *COPS* claims authenticity “*Cops* is filmed on location with the men and women of law enforcement” (Fetveit, 1999. Pg.792). Besides this opening statement, there is no directed narration explicitly influencing audience interpretation or evidence of sufficient editing. This establishes the ‘raw reality’ nature of *COPS* (Doyle, 2003). Each incident the officer encounters appears to happen so naturally and quickly after one another. While the time and upcoming incident flashes at the bottom of the screen, *COPS* is produced to appear as though the conversation is simply picking up where it left off. Before the prior incident, and within minutes of getting back into the car, another incident has been discovered and requires the officer’s intervention. Each incident, which unquestionably takes much longer than they appear, has a very natural aspect to them and gives the impression what is being seen, is occurring in real time. Officers are seen approaching the suspect, talking to the suspect, understanding what has occurred, explaining to fellow officers what has happened, and potentially arresting suspects. The nature of the sound of radios buzzing and natural flow of investigations and detaining disseminates a feeling of ‘nowness’ free from editing. This ‘nowness’ and inconspicuous concealed editing naturalizes the footage (Fetveit, 1999. Pg.792).

The officer is portrayed as being highly knowledgeable by telling the audience “what the people at the scene were feeling, what motivates them, and how this dangerous world of the street works” (Fishman, 1999. PG. 277). Officers demonstrate their knowledge and inform the public about what is really going on in the streets, implicitly suggesting that the public does not have the requisite knowledge, skill, understanding, or resource to do equally (Fishman, 1999. PG. 277).

During chases officers direct the cameras attention to whatever is deemed noteworthy as if the audience is unable to do so. Officers inform the public about what the average criminal thought process and how they work to exploit it.

My dog's name is Vasco. A little psychology of the dog: The dog is an excellent tool to have, if someone runs and you have two police who are standing there, even sometimes with guns out, then that person may go ahead and continue to run, even after the officer tells them to stop. The reason they do that is that they know that most of the time the officer can not or will not shoot at them. They will go ahead and run. If the dog is there and they are able to see the dog, all their concentration most of the time is focused on the dog...criminals are more worried about him and what he's going to do opposed to what I'm going to do to them as a police officer. (Fishman, 1999. PG.277).

All this knowledge and the resources officers have at their disposal gives the impression that they are well equipped and competently able to fight crime while the average citizen is not. "These are special men, with special knowledge, skill, and resources who perform tasks that exceed the capacities of ordinary men (Fishman, 1999. Pg. 278). These individuals have no fear and relish the opportunity to engage in any exciting car chase or gunfight. Officers have no problem educating and informing the audience "what you have right here is a Smith & Wesson. It's a 357, fully loaded" (Fishman, 1999. Pg,277). Thus, *COPS* showcases a particular elite, top-down power and authorizes their perspective in any given segment. This works to authentic and demonstrates a need for a punitive justice system. The citizen is portrayed as helpless and in need of the police expertise and resources to fight crime and maintain a particular natural social order from the stereotypical (Black) criminal. Here *COPS* naturalizes these beliefs by showcasing a dangerous world

through adrenaline pumping car-chases and dramatic altercations between civilians within society.

Allowing the audience to hear from the police officer and getting to know them personally creates an emotional connection and immediately positions them as the protagonist. This encourages the audience to view each incident from the perspective of the police officer and side with their decision-making (besides the fact that the audience is meant to feel as though they themselves are officers along for the ride and constantly physically behind police protection giving the audience an understanding of what the officer sees and no additional perspectives). "The goal is to put you in the passenger seat with them so you can experience what it's like to be a cop" (Doyle, 1998. Pg. 101) Thus, what is designed to be raw reality, is admittedly from a particular perspective. The audience hears why the officer chose to do what he did, what he saw to provoke that decision, and exclusively his side of the story. While in each episode there tends to be a different police officer, the 'good-guy' always remains as the police hero. Depending on the situation, the suspect is given little opportunity to explain their actions and thus the audience is encouraged to interpret *COPS* through the police officers perspective. Thus, the officer becomes the protagonist or the hero. *COPS* doesn't focus on any of the greater political, racial, or socioeconomic context as to why the suspect did what they did or how they found themselves in the position where such an action appeared rational, but nonetheless, they are apart of the uncivilized undermining society from obtaining prosperity.



## ***COPS* AND KNOWLEDGE CONTROL**

*COPS* successfully limits audience confusion and their ability to generate any alternative interpretations of the events. Officers always provide an explanation and ensure the audience understands what happened both objectively and in the officer's opinion. "We boxed the car in. When you box the car in a diamond formation and slow your patrol cars down to the point where he has nowhere to go, and what the suspect attempted to do was ram through the car. As you can see over here, he didn't have anything left of his car to run on, he just kept trying to ram into {the police vehicle} (Fishman, 1999. Pg. 277). The incidents are heavily edited allowing for a particular story line and specific material to be unseen. "Officials of Nashville Metro Police Department had full editorial control of the footage to be aired on the programs" (Hallett et al, 1995, Pg.111). The police officers are given the last word following any incident allowing officers to summarize what the audience has seen and direct/control interpretation. This further leads to audience understandings of police as heroes and the thin blue line between societal chaos and order. Suspects are individually responsible for their actions and portrayed as sapping the system supported by *COPS'* very audience. All of this is largely necessary for a show where the story or understanding of what is happening is largely incomplete.

While not all audience members will decode *COPS* as encoded, evidence suggests that many viewers see *COPS* as an authentic portrayal of reality. *COPS* viewers tend to see *COPS* not as a form of entertainment, but as a form of informational programming (Anderson 1996) (Freeman, 1993). These viewers were

found to hold greater levels of authoritarianism and racism (Oliver et al, 1995. Pg. 565). As the analysis has emphasized, *COPS* provides preexisting views amongst racist viewers. Studies have found that fear of crime, especially by Whites, is predominantly focused on Blacks. Further research has found that regular *COPS* viewers were more fearful of personal victimization in comparison to light viewers (Dowler et al, 2003.).

*COPS* most frequently features street offences such as drug possession, gun possession, small assaults, robberies, and almost exclusively street crimes the public fears the most (Surette, 1998). The majority of these offences are considered to be committed by the Black population. Because *COPS* showcase actuality footage, it will be interpreted by viewers as factual. Thus, *COPS* will have a greater impact on viewers than fictional or daily news programs. As Kooistra et al (1998) state, “nonfiction accounts presented by what are considered to be reliable source have more weight than fictional accounts” (Kooistra et al, 1998. Pg 145-146). Crime reality programs almost exclusively focus on street crime that is predominantly seen as work done by minority males. As Surette (1998) states, “the media provide both a foundation for the public’s various final images and the mortar with which the public constructs its social reality” (Surette, 1998. Pg. 96). *COPS* likely influences greater societies construction of who is committing crime. The representation of crime on *COPS* implicitly creates support for policing practices such as racial profiling; excuses police overuse of force, and maintains/creates the Black criminal stereotype. If viewers constantly see actuality footage of Blacks as criminal suspects,

societal understandings of Blacks as inherently criminal and fearful should be maintained.

### **COPS CONTENT ANALYSIS**

Content analyses of *COPS* consistently find the same results. Generally, violent crime is overrepresented and the myth that Black men commit the majority or at least an over proportionate amount of crime is maintained leading viewers to fear personal victimization by Blacks and that Black neighborhoods are dangerous (Oliver, 1994) (Monk-Turner, 2007) (Mastro et al, 2000).

I have chosen to use the content analysis of *COPS* conducted by Monk-Turner, Martinez, Holbrook, and Harvey (hereafter Monk-Turner et al) because of its relative current nature. The majority of content analysis of *COPS* predominately took place in the mid, to late 1990's and thus Monk-Turner et al (2007) provides the most current findings. Considering *COPS* timeless nature, this may not be overly significant however, it will provide insight as to whether or not *COPS* continues to over represent Blacks as criminal suspects as Oliver (1994) discovered. The Monk-Turner et al analysis is based off random episodes that were shown in 2004 and would include both current and episodes from the earlier seasons.

In the Monk-Turner et al (2007) study, race played a significant role in regards to how characters were depicted. The majority of characters on the show were white (62%). The majority, 67%, of all White characters were portrayed as police officers. Overall, Whites almost exclusively portrayed all police officers (92%), and little over a third appeared as offenders (38%) (Monk-Turner et al,

2007. Pg. 8). For nonwhites, this ratio is dichotomously different. Overall, the most frequently portrayed criminal suspect was Black (45%). Almost all visible minorities portrayed (90%) appeared as criminal suspects. For Blacks, 93% were portrayed as criminal suspects in comparison to only 4% as police officers. Almost all characters (both suspect and police officer) on *COPS* are male (94%)(Monk-Turner et al, 2007. Pg. 8).

The majority (54%), of crimes shown is considered 'Type I' (violent crimes) offences by the US Uniform crime report (Monk-Turner et al, 2007. Pg. 9). These Type I offences are most commonly considered to be 'Black crimes' (burglary and grand theft) (Surette, 1998). Consistently, the majority of these crimes were committed by Black men (55%) and were seen committed by Blacks on 64% of all episodes. Blacks were only seen committing 36% of Type II offences (possession of drugs, domestic disturbances, varying involvement in prostitution). Whites were predominantly (61%) responsible for Type II offences. However, these offences were predominately related to cars and alcohol (drag racing, driving with a suspended license, DUI, drinking in public) (Monk-Turner et al, 2007. Pg. 9). Arguably, the portrayal of these offences is not nearly as disturbing or noteworthy to the public. While viewers may witness them, they are likely overshadowed by the more dramatic crimes of grand theft and burglary. Therefore even with an almost equal representation of White and Black offenders, viewers are unlikely to consider Whites a threat as they are committing less serious dramatic offences.

The lack of Black police officers almost exclusively paints Blacks as offenders on *COPS*. Studies suggest in victim related incidences, a little over half of victims

portrayed are White (Kooistra et al, 1998. Pg.148). In actuality, the most frequently victimized demographic is young Black males (Kooistra et al, 1998. Pg. 148). By underrepresenting young Black males as victims, it becomes possible to create a societal truth that Blacks are preying on innocent White victims. However, this is not the case, the majority (83%) of White casualties are victimized by White perpetrators (FBI, 2011). This allows for the justification of harsher punitive policies and justifies racial profiling, the fortification of white neighborhoods, and the need to protect Whites from the Black criminal other. Increased concern for crime is substantiated by the dramatic increase in the home security business. In 1988 approximately 10% of houses had a security system and has grown into an industry worth more than five billion dollars (Kooistra et al, 1998). These consequences will more thoroughly be discussed within the next chapter.

According to United States criminal statistics the frequency of Type I and Type II offences portrayed on *COPS* are not consistent with actuality. Type II offences were portrayed 46% of the time in the Monk-Turner et al study. However, in actuality Type II offences make up approximately 87% of all reported criminal offences (Kooistra et al, 1998. Pg 148). Thus, although Type I offences occur far less frequently than portrayed in *COPS*, stereotypical Blacks offences are far more predominantly disseminated. These suspects are also more aggressively handled by police. Officers were found to be far more likely to use direct physical aggression towards unarmed Blacks (33.3%) in comparison to 13.2% of Whites (Oliver, 1994. Pg. 187). This finding is particularly interesting and consistent with overaggressive police/neighborhood watch handlings of Blacks such as the cases of Trayvon Martin,

Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown etc. etc. has a number of potential effects and discussion points that will be more thoroughly explored in the following section. Crime reality programs also tend to feature a far higher arrest or 'success' rate. Oliver, (1994) found that police arrested a suspect in 69% of portrayed cases, in comparison to FBI data reporting an 18% arrest rate (Oliver, 1994. Pg. 185) (Oliver et al, 1998. Pg. 21).

To conclude, Blacks are most frequently portrayed as criminal suspects on *COPS* and are more than any other race. White suspects are portrayed almost as frequently as Blacks suspects however, the nature of Whites offences are likely to be less memorable in comparison to their Black counterparts. Whites all but exclusively play the role of police officer, which potentially creates a heroic White police officer myth through the polices over proportionate arrest rate on *COPS*.

### **POLICE OFFICERS PERCEPTION OF *COPS***

While the portrayal of race and crime on *COPS* may not be an accurate portrayal of criminal activity, is the portrayal of police work an accurate representation? In a study by Hallet and Powell (1995), Nashville Police officers featured on *COPS* were given the opportunity to anonymously give feedback on the portrayal of police work disseminated. The study found police officers generally feel that *COPS* gives the public an enhanced nature of police work, these officers did not necessarily feel it was completely accurate, nonetheless, officers did believe it to be the most accurate portrayal available to the general public. (Hallet et al, 1995.

Pg.114). As previously mentioned, police were given complete editorial control over the material publicized on *COPS*. Hallet et al (1995) state,

'*COPS*' is the best representation of police work that there is. We know that this stuff is basically entertainment, but at least it shows some of the shit we have to put up with...AS I mentioned, most of the footage they shot was canned (not used for the show). And...most importantly, anything we didn't want kept on tape had to be erased – that was the deal – and each officered could have erased whatever he wanted to have erased. (Hallet et al. 1995. Pg. 115).

Thus while officers believe *COPS* gives the public a greater understanding of police work, police officers do not consider it to be an authentic portrayal.

#### **COPS Audience and Continued Influence:**

Despite FOX choosing to no longer air *COPS* in order to accommodate for more sports coverage on Saturdays, *COPS* was very quickly picked up by Spike TV. However, the cancellation by no means indicates that *COPS* is losing any of its appeal. Each Saturday night, *COPS* attracts over two million viewers, more than *The Big Bang Theory* that also shares the 8PM time slot on TBS (Spike TV, 2015). The move to Spike TV has resulted in a decrease in viewership by its older audiences, however, *COPS* has seen an increase in viewership of its target audience of men under fifty (Spike TV, 2014). The under twenty-four male demographic in particular has seen a 14% increase, helping to make the program the most popular first-run program on Saturday nights at 8PM (Spike TV, 2014). The increase in viewership by young males may be troubling. As the content analysis to follow will show, *COPS* portrays an incorrect representation-construction of both police work and Blackness. *COPS* frequently portray a Black criminal stereotype and over represents

Blacks as suspects. The suspects on *COPS* appear guilty. They are handcuffed; evidence is shown substantiating their arrests, suspects are shoved into a police car, and presumably charged for whatever offence the police officer has told viewers. While the suspects are innocent until proven guilty, in the viewers mind, they are de-facto guilty. The officer has a particular discursive authority and there is little understanding on the part of the viewer to have any reason to question why this individual is being arrested or why the officer may be incorrect. The fact that this young demographic is increasingly tuning in is troubling as stereotypes are more likely to be activated when the viewer has insufficient knowledge on race, when the mind is less developed, and when primed. The younger demographic is likely to have less knowledge on Blackness in comparison to older generations and thus with the increasing media portrayals of the Black criminal stereotype, this younger generation is likely to have less exposure to critical, neutral understanding of Blackness. Further the younger generation is likely to have far less compulsory education on the topic of Blackness in comparison to the older generations that may be more media literate. The constant priming and showcase of the Black criminal stereotype within the media will lead to unconscious stereotypical interpretations. Thus for this younger generation, with age, the Black criminal stereotype will become increasingly activated with little to no priming.

## **Discussion**

*Although COPS* is a highly edited program it is considered to be info-tainment by its audiences. Many viewers consider *COPS* to be an informative voyeuristic peak



into policing and crime. This 'authentic' portrayal comes to over represent Blacks as criminal suspects and inherently guilty. There are no follow up episodes for viewers to find out whether suspects were innocent or not, which intensifies perceptions of guilt. White police seemingly have the evidence necessary to successfully close a great number of cases and act as heroes between the criminally uncivilized and the innocent audience watching at home. *COPS* maintain the idea that criminals are not like us. They are not our neighbor or the fraudulent financial advisor; it is the poor young Black male. As such, society appears to have a Black, street crime problem. For many, the only answer to this problem is harsher punitive sanctions and more intrusive police action. The notion of Blacks predominately responsible for crime, as the analysis shows creates an 'Us vs. Them' societal mentality that will be further explored in the following section. Cognitively, the overrepresentation of Blacks as criminal suspects on *COPS* has the potential to have a number of serious mental environmental effects. The media representation of crime is largely portrayed through the young Black male creating and invoking a Black criminal stereotype. Consistent with Cultivation and Disposition theories, White viewers should not only enjoy watching *COPS*, but increasingly believe that Blacks are predominantly responsible for crime and dangerous. This may lead to greater racial segregation within society, perceptions of young Black males specifically as dangerous, and encourage state-sponsored racist policies designed to limit and protect Whites from the perceived Black threat.

### Authored Content Analysis

For my content analysis of *COPS* I chose to examine *COPS - Season 15 Episode 9*.<sup>6</sup> The content analysis portrayed:

- No African Americans appeared as police officers and thereby Blacks exclusively play the role of criminal suspect. In the third and final vignette, multiple African Americans informants act as drug dealers. Whites in this vignette appear as criminals and clearly identifiable police attire
- Whites are portrayed as both police officers and criminal suspects. However, White interactions are portrayed in less dramatic scenes where they are impoverished or not criminally suspect.

The montage at the beginning of shows has become notorious for catchy distinct openings. *CSI* made *The Who's*, "Who Are You" famous to a generation fanatical about pop anthems scored by auto tune, while the Rembrandts, "I'll Be There For You," became a fan favorite thanks to *Friends*. Before either of these songs rose to iconic fame, *Inner Circle's*, "Bad Boys" became a cultural anthem for crime on TV and film. As catchy of an opening as it is, it creates a number of discussion points. *Inner circle* is a Jamaican reggae group that almost seems to be speaking to the 'bad boys.' There is no other explicit mentioning of who 'they' are and who is coming for them and the rather obvious fact that they are asking 'bad boys' what they are going to do when the unknown comes for them. *Bad Boys*, a reggae track, and a genre typically associated with Jamaica and Blackness, may allude to the idea of Afro-Caribbean or African heritage as being 'bad boys' or criminal. 'Bad Boys' feels like it is designed to speak to a certain audience, implying those that typically would listen to the song (if it were not the *COPS* opener) are bad, thus of Afro-Caribbean or

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<sup>6</sup> This episode was chosen because of its high rating on TV.com (10/10). The episodes high rating should lead to the episode being broadcasted multiple times as networks will choose to pick the programs highest rated episodes. This episode is more likely to be seen by viewers then episodes that are not rated as highly and thus an acceptable choice for analysis.

African heritage. Unlike *CSI's "Who Are You,"* where the question is asked 'Who are you' or who committed the crime, 'Bad Boy's' implicates that it is a male that has committed the offence. Calling them 'bad boys' does a number of things; it implicates guilt, that 'they,' logically the police, know what they have done, 'they' are powerful enough to capture the 'bad boys,' that the perpetrators need to plan an escape, and finally that they are different and inherently bad and not just 'boys,' or apart of 'they.'

Simultaneously, video clips play of police chasing a car before the driver loses control and smashes into an electrical pole, a completely dumbfounded suspect looks into the camera as though he has no idea what's going on, and police knock down a door. The show starts with a discretion to viewers that what the viewer is about to see is both unscripted and unedited.

*COPS is filmed on location with the men and women of law enforcement. All suspects are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.*

While this may be true, for the viewer, we expect the suspects the police arrest are guilty. That's how crime shows work; evidence is gathered, an arrest is made, and the suspect is guilty and goes to jail. We have little or no evidence to suggest that the officer has misinterpreted the events or missed some piece of crucial evidence that would have the audience to believe otherwise.

## Vignette I

This episode begins with the audience meeting White Las Vegas police officer Matt Fay. He describes how policing runs in his family and how he seems predisposed to such work.

*Officer Fay: The police department here in North Las Vegas is such a family atmosphere. My father is a retired officer from here, my wife is a police officer here, uh my brother is an officer in Northern Nevada so it definitely runs in the family.*

The camera shifts to the front of the car where we see a car pulling up to a stop sign and signal to turn right. The car comes to a rolling stop before proceeding with the turn. Almost immediately we hear the siren ring and the officer decides such a stop wasn't sufficient and declares that it's time to pull them over.

*Officer Fay: And we're gunna stop this car, they just ran this stop sign here at Stockert and Webb.*

Unless what we heard and saw was edited for something else, the officer's discretion in this instance has to be questioned. The suspect's stop sign etiquette of coming to a rolling stop is very normal. Unless the driver was knowingly taking a driving examination, the general population on a daily basis very routinely practices this stop sign etiquette without blinking an eye for repercussions.

It appears to be a routine traffic stop but the officer immediately become suspicious of the two Black males inside.

*Did you happen to see the stop sign back there? Did you happen to see me coming down the street? Go ahead and keep your hands up here and stop digging around the car for me. Go ahead and put your hands where I can see 'em – both of you guys. You guys are movin' around a lot. Whats up? Nervous? Why so nervous?...Would you say that's a complete stop you made?*

*Driver: I don't know I just got my license.*

*Officer: I see the drugs you have in your hand. Don't drop nothing. Put your hands where I can see it. Put your hand where I can see it (officer reaches in*

*and grabs the drivers arm and holds it outside the vehicle and draws his gun),  
PUT YOUR HAND WHERE I CAN SEE IT!*

*Suspect: ok, okay, okay, I will right here*

*Officer: Put your other hand up there*

*Suspect: I will sir.*

*Officer: Put it up on the steering wheel, put it on the steering wheel!*

*Suspect: Okay, okay man, damn.*

*Officer: Understand me?*

*Suspect: Want me to turn the car off?*

*Officer: Don't you move, I'm telling you!*

The officer proceeds to pull out his pepper spray and sprays the driver's eyes for three seconds. At this point, the driver reacts by putting his foot on the gas and drives away leading to an exciting chase off road. Other officers take lead and we are left inhaling the dust of the police chase through the desert. We resume with the camera shaking and the *COPS* crew racing through the brush. The suspect is swarmed by police and arrested out of view before being placed in the back of a patrol car.

*Officer: We got the passenger too.*

*Fellow Officer: We got everybody*

*Officer: Woo, good jobs guys, thanks, good work.*

The officer goes to and speaks to the driver and asks why he ran It's clear that it was a violent arrest as the driver is left with a bloody forehead. It's apparently because he just got out of jail and has no idea about the dope the officer claims to have seen on his lap.

*Officer to driver: Why'd you run?*

*Suspect: Because I just got out of prison.*

*Officer: Has nothing to do with the dope in your hand?*

*Suspect: I ain't got no dope man.*

*Officer: If you just got out of prison, why'd you be running? Well since you just got out of prison, you're going for felony evading, resisting arrest -*

*Suspect: - Resisting arrest, why am I going for resisting? Aw man.*

*Officer: Yes sir.*

The officers speak to the passenger to ask about where they got the dope.

*Suspect II. I didn't know shit. He had got it before I arrived.*

The officer explains his rationale that he needed to spray the driver because he was afraid that he was reaching for a gun, although there was no indication that either suspect was carrying one.

*Officer: I was hoping I'd keep him from driving off, I was scared he was going for a gun, so I put mine away for a few seconds and sprayed him.*

*Officer: We also took the passenger for obstructing because his role of the pursuit and steering the vehicle trying to get away from the police, so he's going to have to answer for his part in the crime as well.*

The case closes and fades to the *COPS* logo illuminated by red and blue sirens while we listen to police officers celebrate a successful and safe arrest.

*Fellow officer: Good job guys, you did a really good job in getting this guy.*

This vignette comes full circle with what Officer Fay described in his opening dialogue about the police being a family. The viewer is left with the imagery of a group of homogenous White police officers celebrating their victory following the arrest of the Black suspects. This vignette is filled with us vs. them and othering ideology. The group of ten white police officers is very clearly on one side while the two Black suspects are on the other. One is capable of breaking the law, and the other is responsible for maintaining and protecting society from lawbreakers.

## **Vignette II**

The second vignette shifts to Palm Springs, California where we meet Officer Gustavo Araiza. It's 8:30PM and he's on the way to a call about birds stuck in a couple's chimney. Admittedly it's a unique call for him.

*Officer Araiza: I've never had an experience like this.*

Arazia drives through what appears to be a middle-Class neighborhood, slowly and is meet by the homeowners. Officer Arazia is surprisingly ahead of the *COPS* crew. The distance may mean nothing, or it may mean the *COPS* production crew really didn't feel a need to get close to the 'action' on this mundane call, or reluctantly followed knowing that this wasn't likely to be overly dramatic and not worth recording. The *COPS* crew peaks in and we see the homeowners, a middle aged White couple who, judging by their dress, either worked late or just came from some sort of function. The couple has made a make-shift barrier on their fire place to restrict birds from entering, however, one managed to get through and we see it flying through the kitchen. Officer Araiza effortlessly catches the creature as though he has done this before and walks it outside. The officer and the couple exchange friendly chit chat and talk about how birds have frequently been taking refuge in chimneys around Palm Springs lately.

*Officer Araiza: I think we run more of a risk inhaling the stuff in the chimney then messing with the birds.*

The officer takes the bag of birds out and the most dramatic moments we see is the officer trying to open the front door without allowing a pesky bird back in. Officer Araiza admits there are more birds then he expected and decides it may be more beneficial to have animal control deal with the birds. For Araiza, the bird excavation is inefficient and a waste of time and he believes it is everyone's best interest to get pest control to solve the issue. This appears to be a slow night as

Officer Araizas' supervisor shows up and is interested in knowing what's going on, although we never see or hear said superior.

This vignette ends with no dramatic arrest or injury. It's simply a police officer dealing with some birds. It does however, show the more mundane side of police work. While the majority of police work doesn't include car chases, gunfights, or physical combat it does include simple patrol and dealing with random citizen issues no matter how heart pounding. Additionally, while it may appear as though officer Araiza didn't successfully resolve the issue or showcase that police can solve any issue; he did. He knew the resources he had available to him were insufficient and thus his recommendation to call animal control, he was able to bring the couple a solution to their problem. He showed that he had sufficient knowledge of how to best deal with the problem, that apparently others wouldn't be able to solve as otherwise, the couple would have continuously carried birds outside only to have them fly in again through the chimney.

The couple's socioeconomic status may influence viewers' perception of the issues classes/races face, and the type of issues police must deal with when dealing with different demographics. There is a distinct difference between the first vignette and the second. Officers had to draw guns and chase their guilty Black suspect. Meanwhile this couple was innocent and wasn't doing anything wrong. They were victims of uncontrollable circumstances while the Black driver brought upon his arrest by apparently being in possession of illegal drugs, refusing to cooperate with the officer, and finally fleeing and resisting arrest. Further, this two vignettes shows that by simply following the rules, the problems one may face on a day-to-day basis,



become much more mundane. Being nervous by the police's presence isn't something that exists when you haven't done anything wrong and aren't connected to illegal activities. When you do interact with police it isn't because you are being questioned or suspected, but simply because an animal has managed to get inside your house. The dichotomous presentation of racial interaction with the police creates different understandings of whom the police are policing, and who they are protecting.

### **Vignette III**

The third and final vignette is set in Tampa Bay where the audience experiences what it is like to run an undercover operation through the Tampa Police Special Operations Division. The audience meets officer Eric Houston midway through his explanation of what is currently taking place. The purpose of the operation, according to Houston, is not solely concerned with arresting the buyers, but to persuade dealers to relocate.

*Officer Houston: Right now we are just trying to get some of the buyers off the street and it will take away the business from the sellers, the sellers that are in the neighborhood. Some of their business is hurt, and they'll go somewhere else hopefully.*

The operation is conducted with six Black stereotypical males loitering at what is clearly a poor neighborhood corner. The Black males' dress varies from an NFL football jersey, to a simple white t-shirt – both very stereotypical 'thug' dress. The operation is set where prospective buyers in cars drive up to the group and simply ask for narcotics.

*Drug Dealer: She straight? She want some? Homegirl want some?*

Once the transaction has taken place, multiple undercover police vehicles swarm the given vehicle; over take the driver and their passengers. Upon arrest, various White police officers inform that through the drug bust, the car is getting confiscated through the Tampe Police Department.

*Officer: Ok well it's now an asset of the Tampa Police department.*

*Suspect: What!*

*Officer: You will be given notice of seizure for the vehicle.*

*Suspect: Can we buy it back out?*

*Officer: We're takin' it.*

*Suspect: We just bought it yesterday, c'mon.*

*Officer: Buying it back from us may be an option.*

*Suspect: I'm not selling it!*

*Officer: We'll be taking seizure.*

At this point, officer Mau Zalansky explains more in-depth how the setup operationalizes, giving the audience insight as to how police conduct successful operations and why. Almost immediately and very seamlessly, the operation repeats. Much like before, the arrested suspect is poor and White. In addition to the marijuana she is in possession of, police officers find crack cocaine.

*Officer: She's got two (crack) stones in her bag here. Smoke crack ma 'me?*

*Suspect: No I was buying it for someone else.*

*Officer: Got two pieces of rock cocaine in her little cigarette pouch, which was next to her leg here.*

Crack cocaine is a notorious drug of the lower socioeconomic classes. Her crack possession indicates to the audience that this woman is of low socioeconomic status. While she is White, crack cocaine is firmly associated with Blackness and poor Whites. She is unlike the middle to upper class White population and is thus othered. All three suspects, or criminals, very clearly belonged to a low economic

class. This constructs the idea of crime being an issue of the lower socioeconomic class and thus requires more punitive policing practices to eliminate and segregate this degrading population. 'They' are clearly not like 'us' as evidenced by their behavior and dependence on drugs. By funneling money into this underground market, the mainstream is deprived of funds that should otherwise contribute to the capitalist system.

This vignette very clearly showcases the fact of state power. The police's confiscation of each suspects' vehicle showcases the power of the state to control and discipline the lives of those considered abnormal through their illegal drug use. The sheer number of officers used for this operation shows their vast array of resources used to maintain order. Further, this vignette shows the hierarchy of race. The Black officers or informants (it is not made clear what they are) are simply used to make the transaction. They are doing exactly what they are notoriously known for doing, dealing drugs. The police have positioned them in a role supposedly familiar, and used a racial stereotype to make the scenario as believable as possible for customers. The criminal drug dealer is profiled and illuminated out in a believable spectacle. Once the transaction is complete, exclusively White police officers take over the more complex and credible portion of the operation. Here race is positioned into believable roles with the Black organized into a deviant display while White police officers conduct their honorable work. The Black officers come to appear as inferior by giving way to the Whites who have very clearly operationalized the setup. The understanding of the criminal in this instance is double-sided. While all arrested suspects in this vignette are White, the more

dangerous criminals, the dealers, are, in the minds of police and citizens watching, phenotypically identical to the (criminal) undercover informants this operation is designed to help eliminate. Thus while this vignette may showcase white criminals, as Officer Houston states, stopping the Black criminal is most desired.

## **SECTION IV**

### ***COPS* IMPLICATIONS**

As outlined in the Monk-Turner et al (2007) analysis, the popular crime reality program *COPS*, supports certain myths about crime and policing in America. The central elements of *COPS'* dissemination of crime implicates the representation of police and criminals. A central myth of crime in the United States is the race of citizens perceived to be criminal. The Monk-Turner et al (2007) analysis demonstrates that *COPS* crime myth focuses on lower-class minority males, specifically, those perceived to be of African ancestry, or Black, as responsible for committing the majority of violent street crime. This should maintain a fear and association between crime and Blackness. As Robinson (2000) claims, Blackness “is treated as a sign for increased risk of criminality” with media depictions reinforcing this notion (Robinson, 2000. Pg. 134). This portrayal should maintain viewers associations between crime and Blackness and lead to a number of potential real world effects. As Chapter III shows, Blacks are over proportionately portrayed as criminal suspects on *COPS* while Whites are predominantly portrayed as police officers. This should lead to the justification of racial profiling with skin color denoting criminal activity and a form of evidence. The over proportionate success rate of police arresting their criminal suspect, justifies controversial policing practices such as racial profiling as the it appears as though during the majority of pretextual traffic stops, police find incriminating evidence and justification for arrest.

This chapter will explore the potential effects these portrayals could have on viewers and the possible societal ramifications. Through viewer cultivation, this chapter's goal is to explore how *COPS* content creates problematic perceptions of 'otherness,' racialized peoples and police work. This should strengthen the power of the Black criminal stereotype and result in a myth of Black criminal threat. Heavy viewers of *COPS* are likely to hold racially dominant/hegemonic perceptions consistent with Hall's (1979) encoding/decoding schema. As a result, associations between Blackness and criminality will become inherently natural and commonsensical for viewers and have implications for urban spaces and notions of societal law and order. Racial profiling becomes a justifiable practice in order to maintain societal law and order. The imagery of the Black body becomes one associated with danger and in need of being controlled, surveilled, and segregated from White populations. Legislation such as Castle Doctrines have been enacted in order to give the public the right to defend themselves and their property. However, with the Black body being signified as inherently dangerous, this legislation has come to create racial violence in perceived cases of threat. Castle Doctrines arguably act as a tool of legalized state racism that operates through practices of disciplinary power and biopower. This legislation has increased the media's focus on racial violence against Blacks. The case of Trayvon Martin and others has shown this legislation to be problematic and consequently label the Black body as dangerous, and excusably authorizes the slaying of Blacks in White spaces.

### ***COPS* and Law and Order/Crime Control Ideology**

While there is no particular public opinion of the criminal justice system or policing, there is a dominant one - the law and order/crime control ideology.<sup>7</sup> This ideology places emphasis and prioritizes aggressive arrests, prosecution, and conviction of criminals. Due process is deemphasized believing that suspected criminals are guilty. The law and order/crime control model claims that the repression of criminal activity is of utmost importance and the “most important function to be performed by the criminal process.” Consistent with Gitlin, if the law is not enforced to its fullest effect, law-abiding citizens become victims of all sorts of personal invasions and most importantly their ability to function as a member of society sharply declines. One of the central purposes of the criminal justice system is that of a “positive guarantor of social freedom” (Packer, 1964. Pg. 4). According to the crime control model, punishment is designed to serve as lesson to the perpetrator and as deterrence to others (Packer, 1964). Due process slows down the process, because as the model proposes, the majority of criminal suspects are guilty (Packer, 1964). This creates an ‘us vs. them’ or ‘good vs. evil’ mentality. Crime is a problem of evil and inherently inferior people/culture. This ideology takes social qualities of meaning such as race or poverty to construct people within this ‘us and them’ structure. Thus, portrayals of this ideology is likely popular amongst Whites because it positions White audiences in a dominant ‘us’ position and superior to the Black/impooverished ‘them.’ *COPS* fittingly showcases the crime

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout this section, the law and order/crime control ideological model will be interchangeably referred to either as ‘law and order ideology,’ or ‘crime control.’

control model through dramatic police cases and physical altercations between suspects and police. Audiences are drowned in arresting images of Blacks and the lower classes at a rate over proportionate to actuality. Meanwhile, corporate crime or disturbances in upper class neighborhoods are given little attention. Almost all crime is portrayed taking place in lower class neighborhoods making crime appear as though it is not committed by the upper classes,

Most often, it's poor neighborhoods where '*COPS*' goes for its stories. Wealthy areas, while often host to the same domestic abuse and robbery problems that make up the programs staple of policing situations, are disdained as not crime ridden enough...traditionally, we don't go and ride in those areas (Bernstein, 1992: Pg. F1).

While not all viewers will interpret or accept that *COPS* is reality, or the messages it disseminates, research suggests that many viewers do (Oliver, et al, 1995). Anderson (1996) found that viewers see crime reality programs as informational programming rather than entertainment and view *COPS* as similar to local news (Anderson 1996) (Freeman, 1993). As mentioned above, crime control is very presentable to viewers. Simultaneously, many White viewers are inclined to agree with the law and order model and thereby *COPS* should appeal to audiences. Oliver et al (1995) confirm such a position. *COPS* was "most enjoyed by viewers who evidenced higher levels of authoritarianism, reported greater punitiveness about crime and reported higher levels of racial prejudice" (Oliver et al, 1995. Pg. 565) Consistent with Gerbner, these viewers also reported to be more fearful of criminal victimization in comparison to light viewers (Haghighi et al, 1996. Pg. 23). As stated previously, *COPS* may not necessarily convert nonbelievers into believers, it certainly does preach to the choir and reinforce their fears of crime. Thus consistent



with almost every single theorist this analysis is structured on, *COPS* appears to, at minimum, reinforce and reproduce existing views.

Today, the portrayal of 'otherness' in the media is most commonly done through the representation of Black males. 'Otherness,' 'othered,' or 'other' can interchangeably be defined as a quality of being different and unlike the majority. Studies have found that race related representations have an impact on public perceptions. The portrayal of racial stereotypes serves as "substitutions for reality" that become projected and associated in reality on these 'others' (Hooks, 1990). Most commonly, racialized people on *COPS* are shown having problems that require a disproportionate amount of state attention or resources which disrupt society or create problems – Section III clearly showcases this. Consistent with Hall et al (1978), the medias portrayal of Black street crime isolates African Americans as a threat to society and inherently a problem of Black culture, and effectively resonating with the *COPS* audience. Consistent with Gerbner, studies have found that the portrayal of young Blacks as criminal creates fear and resentment towards the African American population (Benjamin, 2002). This works to create a moral panic within society in need of law and order.

Police are the thin blue line between 'them' and 'us' and if we do not encourage police to fight crime, and target those responsible to their fullest capability, society is likely to crumble into chaos (Barthes, 1957) (Boyle, 1998). This creates a social fear of personal victimization and anger towards the believed criminal population. This fear and anger rile up support for more punitive policing policies such as carding and profiling those perceived responsible for crime. The law

and order ideology almost exclusively targets visible street crime. White-collar crime, which in some instances can be more impactful than street crime, is largely ignored and perceived as less of a societal threat than street crime. Former co-producer of *COPS* Dick Clark stated “I love the idea (of corporate *COPS*, I don’t think it would make very interesting reality TV. Unless we could get those people to ride in their SUV’s and drive really fast down the street...when the police go after the guy that has just stole \$85 million, they (the police) treat him like he was a member of the city council, which he may or may not be, and it’s not exciting television (Moore, 2002).”

This portrayal of street crime and law and order ideology works well with the television media format because of its drama, violence, simplicity, and unmistakably identifiable ‘bad guys.’ The White financial advisor, who has just embezzled millions of dollars from his clients, is not as easily identifiable as the young Black male with his pants sagging around his knees running from police. Goldman Sachs is simply not as interesting of a backdrop for a criminal arrest than a police chase through the streets of South Central Los Angeles. It is easy for an audience with heightened levels of racial discrimination to side with the (White) ‘good’ officer (and through the means identified in chapter 3). The White man in his suit doesn’t look nearly as dangerous or criminal as the Black stereotypical male; ‘he’s one of us;’ are you sure he actually did it?’ Arresting the young Black male is viewed as a sure fire conviction as his Blackness, or his inherent inferiority makes him guilty and prone to criminal activity (according to Law and Order/Crime Control ideology). Because he is Black, he is inherently prone to criminal behavior as

he is not like us and thus cannot control himself from committing offences. Some people may think 'he is apart of the problem, I saw his kind on the evening news snatching a purse from an innocent old lady.'

### **Law and Order/Crime Control Ideology – Justification for Racial Profiling**

As evidenced by Kooistra et al (2007), police officers on *COPS* have an overwhelming high arrest rate in comparison to policing statistics. Police officers on *COPS* successful arrest almost 75% of suspected criminals. In reality, only 21.4% of offences end in an arrest (Kooistra et al, 1998. Pg. 150). This signifies to the public that crime is rarely successful and never pays. There is a message of reassurance to the public that everything is in order. If someone does break the law, the police will find, arrest, and protect society from future infractions. This disparity contributes to police and societal justification for controversial practices such as racial profiling. While Blacks make up approximately 12% of the American population, they account for almost 75% of "routine traffic stops" (Kooistra, 1998. Pg. 151). Michigan democrat John Conyers Jr. asserts "race-based traffic stops turn driving, one of our most ordinary and fundamental American activities into an experience fraught with danger and risk for people with colour" (Rogers, 2000). The depiction of police pretextual stops of Blacks in combination with an inaccurate arrest rate implicitly implies that police are likely to find some sort of criminal behavior when stopping/questioning Blacks. A pretextual traffic stop, commonly referred to as 'driving while Black,' is the police practice of stopping a vehicle for a generally minor traffic violation to give the officer the opportunity to investigate unrelated suspected criminal activity (O'Day, 1998). The apparent fruitful nature of pretextual

traffic stops on *COPS* makes it appear as though it is a successful and beneficial policing strategy. An example of this was seen in section III. Few could reasonably assert that they would expect to get pulled over for coming to a rolling stop at a stop sign. Whether or not the officer knew the vehicle occupants were Black is unknown, however, such an incident shows the audience no matter how minor the original violation is, police officers have a good chance of finding more substantial criminal violations when dealing with Black citizens. Pulling Blacks over subsequently leads to the police getting criminals off the streets and thereby makes society safer. The police engage in this practice for a very simple reason; it catches criminals. If Blacks account for a disproportionate percentage of those arrested, police are led to believe that it makes sense to stop a disproportionate number of Blacks. Thereby, with police officers on *COPS* having an over proportionate arrest rate during pretextual stops, audiences (and fellow police officers watching *COPS*) may believe that racial profiling is a justified and encouraged policing practice (by both regular citizens and police departments) as it appears to catch criminals. In this regard, *COPS* may very well have the ability to influence how the police, police (and I do not mean only those being showcased on a crime reality program).

The perpetual presentation of Blacks as criminal on *COPS* signifies them as criminal to audiences. Rose (2002) contends "Blacks bodies have been supersaturated with meaning...the dominant and hegemonic narrative attach to Black men in particular has been one of criminal danger" (Rose, 2002. Pg. 182). Their behavior threatens by posing an internal threat to law and order and thus the approach of viewing Blacks as intrinsically criminal promotes more racialized

policing practices to combat the supposed societal decline caused by rampant Black street crime. (Doyle, Pg. 38). The threat of Blackness, while it cannot be completely eliminated, must be contained. This results in increased surveillance and racial profiling to ensure he stays both geographically and socially in his place. Black-on-Black crime, or Black-on White crime has gained a great deal of societal devotion, little attention has been direct to white-on-white crime suggesting that Whiteness and crime are not terms associated with another. The stigmatization of Black culture as criminal, turns Blacks into racialized subjects who are constantly under suspicion. Thus in the White discourse, people phenotypically associated with African descent become coded as a dangerous other. Skin color becomes a form of evidence. Consistent with disposition theory, this likely speaks to White audiences. As per Gamson (1995) “the image of the enemy – the violent criminal – has the additional advantage of providing a hidden image of the ‘Black’ violent criminal whose content can be decoded in this way by the intended audience while providing the users of the image with plausible deniability of any racial intent” (Gamson, 1995. Pg. XI).

This ideology and the practice of racial profiling/driving while Black, consequently brands all Blacks as suspicious. This suspicion is not based on individuals who have already committed crimes, but on a phenotypical characteristic. Skin color becomes evidence and a proxy for criminal behavior. This is supported by the *Toronto Star* series on racial profiling within Toronto. The investigation found that Blacks of all economic positions were being singled out by Toronto police (Rankin et al, 2012).

## **BLACKS AND SPACE**

The 1968 Terry v. Ohio decision, the United States Supreme Court authorized police to conduct stops and searches based on the “reasonable suspicion” that criminal behavior was stirring, grounded on an individual's presence within a high crime area and evasive behavior (Wacquant, 2005. Pg. 129). This has “resulted in stops and frisks of residents of inner cities – primarily poor persons, African-Americans, and Hispanic Americans – far out of proportion to their numbers and often without justification” (Harris, 1994. Pg. 622-623). This creates a cycle where police arrest inner-city residents who avoid the police because of the ongoing harassment they are subjected to by police (see Freddie Gray). However, the fusion of Blackness and criminality is not limited to the borders of the racialized inner city. But rather, the doctrine ‘out of place’ has spread to other districts where police officers (and citizens) are warranted to be suspicious of people of certain races in an area predominately populated by another. The ‘out of place’ doctrine gives police both legal and political standing to use race as a discretionary factor, and a form of evidence when deciding who is considered suspicious. The ‘out of place’ doctrine justifies police questioning or pulling over Blacks in a neighborhood that is predominantly White. It permits Blacks to be questioned/pulled over at a disproportionate rate as there are more predominantly White neighborhoods than Blacks leading to African Americans being stopped and potentially charged. A number of American courts have justified the doctrine essentially allowing police to view Blacks as being de facto guilty without any indicators to suggest criminal behavior (Wacquant, 2005. Pg. 129).

The out of place doctrine acts as a form of victim blaming and more fundamentally, an aspect of 'Black guilt.' Victim blaming of course is the practice of interpreting the events of a particular crime in such a way that the victim becomes, if not arguably the perpetrator, an accomplice and catalyst to the crime committed against them. The most obvious example is sexual assault and women's dress, location, and sexual history. Similarly, Black-on-Black crime coincides by communicating that there is something inherently inferior about Black people and the dangers Black culture presents to potential innocent White victims. The media showcase of Black crime revolves around crime being a Black issue, and not an issue of poverty, class, or economic opportunity. Meanwhile, a phenomenon such as 'White-on-White' crime seems entirely inconceivable. Although criminal statistics show that Whites are more frequently perpetrators of crime in comparison to Black counterparts. Media showcases such as *COPS* never label such instances as epidemics threatening to sweep the nation by storm (Anderson et al, 2013. Pg. 26-27). White privilege portrays violence by Whites, a problem of class, youth, or parenting and not one of biology or culture. In cases of racial profiling, for Blacks, the real crime they have committed is not the expired license, or small drug possession, but their blackness itself. Racial profiling is not 'driving while Black' or 'walking while Black,' but 'existing while Black.' The association of race and crime leads to heightened suspicion, greater fear of being personally victimized, and victim blaming. 'I stopped you because you look suspicious, you look suspicious because you are Black.' What makes the target complicit in their own victimization

is their Blackness itself. The privileged gaze finds justification for the questioning through the Black stereotype and association between race and crime.

The Jim Crow laws regulated and controlled the movement of Black bodies making their presence in White spaces a crime (Wills, 2013. Pg. 228). Although such explicit laws are no longer in effect, there is reason to believe such sentiments still exist. The results of a 2012 poll evidenced that 21% of Mississippi Republican voters believed that interracial marriage should be illegal, while another 12% were undecided (Wills, 2013. Pg. 228). The Jim Crow laws created legal legitimacy to control and use force against Black movement. Today, legislation such as Castle Doctrines legitimizes the White populations capacity to deal with the presence of the Black body. To combat this problem, 'tough on crime' legislation is promised by hopeful political applicants. Castle Doctrine legislation, such as Florida's "Stand Your Ground," further enables acceptable gun use where racial violence fuels the need for concerned citizens to arm themselves in defense from dangerous Black youth. Such 'tough on crime' declarations act as coded language indicating harsher policing and profiling practices on Black criminals. The perception of the dominant race of who is committing crime is the dominant societal perception. Thus, 'tough on crime' pronouncements communicates to viewers that the state will use resources to target, control, and forcefully deal with Black populations to limit their inherent criminality from posing any sort of violent threat upon the White population.



## **FOUCAULT –BIOPOWER/DISCIPLINARY POWER AND STATE RACISM**

The over proportionate showcasing of Blacks on *COPS* as being predominately responsible for crime has the potential to have a number of policy implications that may result in Black over incarceration, racial profiling, police mistreatment, and the justified killing of Blacks by police and citizens. Michel Foucault's theory on race provides an intriguing Skelton to analyze forms of state racism. For Foucault, racism is a "basic mechanism" of government power (Foucault 1976. Pg. 276). Foucault further argues, "racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows others to be killed. Once the state functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the State" (Foucault, 1976. Pg. 256). For Foucault, the modern state operates certain mechanisms that manage populations (Havis, 2013. Pg. 122). Through mechanisms such as biopower and disciplinary power Foucault links seemingly mundane state actions to legitimated forms of state racism. For Foucault, many explicitly race neutral laws act as vital mechanisms to further particular racialized discourses and agendas (Foucault 1976. Pg. 244). While racism is most often considered to be performed through explicit means for Foucault, it is more implicit methods of disciplinary and biopower that regulate and manage populations.

### **Disciplinary Power**

Disciplinary power works through normalizing, hierarchical observation, and examination. (Foucault, 1976. Pg. 242-246). For example, the standard classroom, good behavior and study habits are prescribed. Average grades and behavior are defined and students who do not meet particular academic or behavioral standards

are prescribed to get after school help (additional training) or normalizing medication via a medical professional. Trayvon Martin's presence within the gated community was not consistent with acceptable socially prescribed norms, or location for Blacks. The neighborhoods gated feature afforded extra security to its residents and was designed to keep people like Martin out. The norm, (or stereotype) for Blacks is criminal. To the observer, Martin must be in the neighborhood with some sort of criminal intent and needs to be confronted and banished to re-establish neighborhood safety and order. Martin's attire makes it easy for Zimmerman to associate Trayvon with the Black criminal stereotype and examine his every move and supposed actions as suspicious.

### **Biopower**

Biopower is designed to deal with population categories such as race. According to Foucault, race is one of the most prominently used characteristics for population control. Biopower is "addressed to a multitude of men, not to the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that they form...a global mass that is affected by overall processes, characteristics of birth, death, production, illness and so on" (Foucault, 1976. Pg. 243). Individuals are not seen as a singular, but as members of a larger category with certain essential attributes. Consistent with Barthes and Fanon, there is a stripping of individual characteristics and a branding of personal qualities. According to Foucault, the modern state has a racial hierarchal system where particular "human subspecies" are valued more worthy than others (Foucault, 1976. Pg. 247). Under this framework of biopower, population management becomes a state problem where

undesirable populations are left to wither while the more desirables are made to thrive (Foucault, 1976. Pg. 247). To control this issue, the state induces particular practices that 'make live and let die.' Tools such as *COPS*, over incarceration, and tough on crime policies work to limit the ability of Blacks to flourish and climb social, political, and economic ladders all the while allowing elements of White culture to thrive.

For Foucault, it is only through the death of undesirable populations, that it becomes possible for the desired subspecies to truly flourish (Foucault, 1976. Pg. 256). This acts as a form of population hygiene designed to limit the populations that drain the greater society and limits the threat the inferior subspecies poses. The inferior subspecies are the criminals, impoverished, and those of low socioeconomic status. Therefore, Blacks need to be controlled, surveilled, and segregated from the White population. This population cleansing works through biopower infiltrating itself into disciplinary measures and jointly produce state sponsored racism (Havis, 2013. Pg. 124).

If the state makes conditions that decides whom to "make live and let die," then consistent with Foucault, the mechanism, which do so, need not, and do not work through conscious decision (Foucault, 1976. Pg. 247). Therefore, many policies that on the surface are racially neutral are instilled with particular racial bias unbeknownst to the majority population. In the United States and Canada, policies dealing with crime, may appear racially neutral however, because of the rampant association between Blacks and crime it is easy for the state to implement state-sponsored racist policies. As Havis (2013) discusses, not explicitly racist individuals

have “automatic racialized responses” with individuals “seeing Black” as violent and dangerous (Havis, 2013. Pg. 123). Florida’s “Stand your ground law” provides an example of governmental justification for citizens to confront the threat of Black violence with force. ‘Stand your ground’ authorizes citizens to defend and protect their property and themselves in cases of threat or perceived threat. Citizens are permitted to “meet force with force, including deadly force, if he or she reasonably believes it is necessary to do so to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony” (Florida Legislature, 2015) This is incredibly general and allows for a great deal of personal discretion for one to decide what/when a reasonable threat is present.

Black bodies are considered de facto guilty and with biopower, the Black population in whole comes to be seen as criminal. Thereby, a person’s perception of Blackness is not simply personal choice, but a form of knowledge confined within a larger structure where Blackness is perceived as inferior and dangerous. As noted, stereotypes are powerful enough to infect and unconsciously alter civilians decision-making even if they are not explicitly racist (by creating automatic responses when dealing with what they perceive as a threat especially in instances that require quick, immediate decision making). In order to allow the White race to flourish, it becomes necessary to segregate and police the borders between Whites (superior) and Blacks (inferior). Castle doctrine legislation has given citizens and police the authority to deal with Black intruders who come into White neighborhoods.

## CASTLE DOCTRINES

Castle Doctrines and 'stand-your-ground' laws are legal defenses for individuals charged with criminal homicide. A Castle Doctrine empowers an individual to use reasonable force, including deadly force to defend their respective property, person, or others. Stand-your-ground laws allow individuals to use reasonable force, including deadly force for purposes of self-defense, or where there is reasonable belief of a threat. Stand-your-ground laws do not require individuals to retreat inside of their premise thus allowing individuals to use deadly force in public environments when there is reasonable belief of threat.

Castle doctrines effectively give private individuals the right to surveil public spaces for potential threats and use 'deadly force' if necessary. How can one decide when it is reasonable to use deadly force? Who gets to decide? The infrequent and random nature of crime has shown surveillance to be an ineffective deterrence for crime, thus what individuals perceive as danger, has to be rooted in some predetermined notion. For many people, that would mean young Blacks males. Thus, in a society where dangerous threats are predominantly associated with Blackness, Castle Doctrines appear to be racially neutral, however, they are in fact, state-sponsored racism. Residents have the right to use deadly force in a public setting where many, if not all civilians have the right to be. It is not necessary to be doing something illegal or dangerous/violent to be considered suspicious. Thus, for Blacks living in a society where mundane nonthreatening actions are more frequently interpreted as threatening, face the challenge of self-regulating their behavior. Knowing this would likely make Blacks appear anxious, to fidget, and

avoid eye contact. All of which would cause Blacks to appear suspicious, defeating their initial purpose. Blacks are more likely to be perceived as suspicious or threatening even when no threat exists. Thus, Blacks face a greater threat of personal bodily injury or even death by civilians who mistakenly interpret their actions as suspicious and hold implicit racial fears towards African-Americans.

### **The Threat of Blacks in Whiteopias**

Predominantly White neighborhoods have become increasingly popular within North America. These areas tend to be gated and have a number of potential additional security features not found in the stereotypical late twentieth century suburban neighborhood. As previously discussed, Whites have a tendency to create 'White Meccas,' 'White Wonderlands,' or interchangeably 'Whiteopias.' These are often affluent White neighborhoods promised to have all of the previously mentioned benefits and values associated with predominantly White affluent neighborhoods. These areas however, have come with the need to be protected from any sort of external threats (Davidson, 2013. Pg. 34). Checkpoints or barriers such as gates, neighborhood passports, guard towers, guest registration, CCTV, and neighborhood watch programs exist in order to police who can come and go. The development of these areas not only has an effect on the Whites that are associated with them, but also poses a potential threat to all non-whites within the vicinity. In order to defend these White spaces, thirty-six American States have implemented various Castle Doctrines (Florida's Stand Your Ground referenced throughout) enabling residents to use their discretion on what or who poses a threat to

themselves or their property. As has been argued, Black are regularly considered to responsible for crime, and thus laws such as these that appear racially neutral are in actuality, aimed at the threat Blacks pose to these White spaces. These Whiteopias pose a threat to non-whites by members of these communities, or those working security for these areas, to see Blacks as a heightened threat of not belonging. This is the case with Trayvon Martin. While Martin had nothing on him but a bottle of Ice Tea and some Skittles, Trayvon's Blackness transgressed the boundaries of a Whiteopia and through a protect and defend mentality, Martin lost his life. "When you mix a license to kill with deep and embedded racial distrust, you have a recipe that is certain to produce tragedies like the Martin Killing" (Davidson, 2013. Pg. 34).

### **CASTLE DOCTRINE AND BLACK DEATH**

Castle Doctrines in conjuncture with the perceived threat of Blacks has lead to an increase in the number of justified deaths. In the state of Florida, following the establishment of the 'stand your ground' law, approximately 70% of defendants have successfully been cleared of any wrongdoing. Interestingly, in cases where the victim was Black, defendants were cleared 73% of the time of any wrongdoing in comparison to 59% in cases with a White victim (Hundley, 2012). This may be explained by the simple notion that if/when a White person invokes a castle doctrine defense, White judges and jurors are implicitly more likely to believe that said individual 'reasonably' feared for their life when dealing with a Black victim. In cases where a White encounters a Black, Jurors are more likely to perceive the

African American as inherently dangerous and criminal, and discount the possibility that the White individual in question was the aggressor.

*COPS* predominantly portrays Blacks as criminal suspects in poor neighborhoods. This repeated portrayal places crime and Blacks in impoverished areas giving African Americans little to no reason to be in affluent gated communities. Therefore, the Black body appears suspicious to the White gaze (in such areas). Such was the case for Trayvon Martin. Even if Blacks give observers little reason for suspicion, they have still committed a crime; existing while Black. Like Rodney King, Blacks in *COPS* are stereotypically portrayed as violent and aggressive - if they are not confronted or stopped, the threat remains.

The visual representation of the black male body being beaten on the street by the policemen and their batons was taken up by the racist interpretive framework to construe King as the agent of violence, one whose agency is phantasmatically implied as the narrative precedent and antecedent to the frames that are shown. Watching King, the white paranoiac forms a sequence of narrative intelligibility that consolidates the racist figure of the black man: 'He had threatened them, and now he is being justifiably restrained.' 'If they cease hitting him, he will release his violence and now is being justifiably restrained.' King's palm turned away from his body, held above his own head, is read not as self-protection but as the incipient moments of a physical threat (Butler, 1993. Pg. 16).

The Stereotypical young Black male body has come to be seen as inherently dangerous. The White population needs to be protected from the violence the Black body supposes to represent and prepared to perform regardless of whether it has suggested this behavior. "This is an action that the black male body is always already performing within that white racist imaginary" (Butler, 1993. Pg.19)

The kind of 'seeing' that the police enacted, and the kind of 'seeing' that the jury enacted, is one in which a further violence is performed by the



disavowal and projection of that violent beating. The actual blows against Rodney King are understood to be fair recompense, indeed, defenses against, the dangers that are 'seen' to emanate from his body. Here 'seeing' and attributing are indissoluble. Attributing violent to the object of violence is part of the very mechanism that recapitulates violence, and that makes the jury's 'seeing' into a complicity with that police violence. (Butler, 1993. Pg. 19).

As Butler contends, how the Black body is perceived is imperative. What objectively appears as a young Black male is much greater. For Butler, it is the "White paranoia" that has transformed an innocent body into something threatening and to be feared. Without anything to suggest otherwise, without any sort of movement, an African American is something that a superior population needs to be protected from. Any injection of Blackness within a 'Whitemecca' poses a threat on the purity and safety associated within the fortified 'Whitetopia.'<sup>8</sup> With the Jury seeing a subdued Rodney King as a dangerous threat, "was achieved is not the consequence of ignoring the video, but, rather, of reproducing the video within a racially saturated field of visibility" (Butler, 1993. Pg. 13). Much was the same during the trial of Trayvon Martin. It was not necessarily Zimmerman on trial, but a debate of how dangerous Martin appeared. The brutal takedowns on *COPS*, the blows King receives, and the bullet that pierces Martin is the violence the viewer or society would suffer without the heroic police's protection. The *COPS* audience identifies with mundane Black vulnerability, but the audience construes it as potentially their own. If *COPS* suspects are not aggressively and forcibly handled,

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<sup>8</sup> Whites have a tendency to create 'White Meccas,' 'White Wonderlands,' or interchangeably 'Whiteopias.' These are often affluent White neighborhoods promised to have all of values associated with predominantly White affluent neighborhoods.

then it will be them, the audience that will experience this violence by these Black males.

Castle Doctrines arm Whites with ammunition to justifiably kill Blacks they mistakenly deem suspicious. While such legislation may appear racially neutral on the surface, it is a prime example of state racism. The association between Blacks and crime make it implicitly target Blacks protecting populations arguable more desirable. If a young 140lb White male was walking down the street at night, unarmed, would anyone consider him suspicious? If a Black security guard were to approach the teen, argue, and eventually shoot the White teenager, would any police officer, jury, or judge believe that the young White male was reasonably suspicious or posed a threat? And if the deceased could speak, would anyone doubt his claim that the Black was the aggressor? Is it even possible to imagine such a backwards scenario?

### **BLACKS ASSOCIATIONS AND WHITE FLIGHT**

The continued racial segregation of Blacks has become a central feature to a great deal of African-American experience. Blacks remain the most racially segregated racial category in the United States (Quillian et al, 2001. Pg. 717-718). Studies have shown that White avoidance and White flight from neighborhoods with only a small number of Blacks is key in maintaining Black neighborhood segregation. Despite increases in racial tolerance, the majority of Whites still do not want to live in a neighborhood composed 30% or more by Blacks with more than half of Whites claiming they would not move into a neighborhood that is a third, or more Black (Clark, 1991) (Farley et al, 1994). Mobility patterns confirm this

showing Caucasian housing demands fall when a neighborhood is home to a number of black residents (Quillian et al, 2001. Pg. 719). Whites move out, refuse to move in, and these neighborhoods quickly become predominantly Black, and segregated from integrating with other neighborhoods. Why do Whites so adamantly look to avoid neighborhoods with Black residents? Some studies claim it is because the racial conformation is indicative of neighborhood issues such as crime and poverty and thus White flight movements are in response and a technique to avoid personal victimization (Liska et al 1995). This of course would lead to neighborhood deterioration and lowered property values. Research by Taub et al. (1984) claims that residents most strongly respond to fears regarding incoming neighborhood crime and neighborhood deterioration as their most frequented response as to where people chose to live (Taub et al, 1984). Interestingly, in controlled laboratory studies, when crime rates are fixed, the racial composition of a neighborhood has little influence on White attitudes towards settlement. Further, when neighborhood characteristics such as crime are controlled, housing prices, movement, and neighborhood satisfaction are found to have no correlation with the racial composition (Quillian et al, 2001). These controlled studies suggest that it is not skin color that necessarily deters Whites from living in more heterogeneous neighborhoods, but other reasons (such as perceived increases in crime and resulting lowered property values).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The controlled nature of these studies appears to be key. In a closed setting with the ability to control and determine resident actions, fears of personal victimization, neighborhood deterioration, and property values provides stability and the ability to see into the future. However, in reality, this is not possible. Crime rates, property values, etc can be predicted, but not guaranteed. Thus, while participants may be

While controlled participants may verbally agree to such a scenario, in a reality full of unknowns, such settlement may very well not be the case. However, these issues are often correlated with race. "The resident, whether Black or White, is aware that these problems [crime and deterioration] tend to be more severe in areas of high minority concentration" (Taub et al. 1984. Pg. 181) White movement is not influenced by skin color alone, but rather the associations of race, crime, and the Black criminal stereotype. Thus, to reduce neighborhood racial segregation, there must be a reduction between perceived Blackness, poverty, and crime. Improvement to Black socio-economic status should lead to greater spatial integration without increasing displaced segregation.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD PERCEPTIONS AND BLACKS**

Cemented crime rates do not tell the whole story. White perception of specific neighborhoods plays a vital role in Caucasians decision-making of whether to settle or not. Studies by Taub et al. (1984) show there is no considerable correlation between neighborhood crime rates and perception of neighborhood crime (Taub et al, 1984). Neighborhood perceptions more accurately portray White settle settlement then actual crime rates. While the actual crime rate without question will influence the neighborhood perception, the two are not a mirrored image. Media reports of unrest or disorderly conduct has an impact on perceptions of neighborhood crime. Neighborhood perception thus become centrally focused on

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willing to accept a fail-safe return on their investment, a cemented level of neighborhood satisfaction, such is knowingly not assured in reality.

influences such as racial composition, economics, age, sex, class, visible signs of neighborhood deterioration, etc. etc.

Stereotypes are likely to play a role in neighborhood perception. In neighborhoods where the occupants appear to closely fit the Black criminal stereotype, perceptions of neighborhood crime would theoretically increase. Elderly Blacks are less likely to create perceptions of crime, as they do not fit the stereotype. However, teenagers and young adults (12-29) will likely trigger fears of neighborhood crime. The presence of young black men acts as a type of 'broken window' indicating crime.

Other studies suggest that such movements are a result of people's racist views towards Blacks and a tool of aversion. If the perceived crime rate of a neighborhood is affected by the percentage of minorities, then the racial composition of a given neighborhood may influence White mobility and settlement. Even if neighborhood perceptions are mainly based off nonracial measures, such as neighborhood crime rates, neighborhood satisfaction, etc. if these observations are influenced by race, they cannot be considered race neutral. As noted, these traits are predominately associated with White neighborhoods and the maintenance of these values with the maintenance of such Whiteopia communities. This sediment may lead to policies that support such associations such as high property values, lack of immediately accessible community services, public transportation, and other activities Blacks (mainly through the presumption of poverty) would frequently need/use. All of these ideas insinuate that members of these Whiteopias have a particular perception and neighborhood identity consistent with Benedict

Anderson's concept - imagined communities (Anderson, 2006). This would remain consistent with Foucault's idea that a nation's perceptions are consistent with the perceptions of the dominant race (on a much smaller scale). These boundaries are not natural or real but have been created. Thus, every neighborhood (gated communities especially) can be seen as nations in of themselves with boundaries and borders, beyond where other nations or outsiders lie. Throughout history, despite these differences, these imagined communities have led people to die for others they feel a particular connection to, despite not having any real correlation (i.e., war between countries). Thus, the desire by Whites to create these Whiteopia neighborhoods and ensure their maintenance through this imagined community is based off racial associations (and resulting neighborhood consequences). For the sake of maintaining high property values, perceived safety, etc. etc. borders and boundaries define what (and who) is inside and what is out. These borders need to be protected otherwise external threats may degrade the neighborhood associations and values. The neighborhood borders are not natural or real (a gate and high walls are not objectively a real border/define a real objective difference), but rather are socially created through imagined belonging. Because of this, members see themselves as having a connection with one another despite any number of real differences that differentiate them. Based on this sense of belonging, members become prepared to act on behalf of the imagined community to defend and preserve it.

*COPS* representation of Blackness creates a need amongst the White community to defend one another in order to deter and defend their community and

its members from the dangerous, inferior Black.. As mentioned, crime on *COPS* almost exclusively takes place in low-income neighborhoods populated by Black residents who are supposedly predisposed to criminal activity. This selective representation highlights many negative attributes supposedly personified by Blacks thereby encouraging Whiteopian neighborhoods out of need to fortify against the African American threat. Because Blacks are portrayed as an 'other' or as a 'them,' they become a source of danger to neighborhood order who need to be dealt with by the overly knowledgeable police. Neighborhood residents may not have the resources necessary however, as *COPS* showcases, the police do. Thereby the police become the thin blue line between chaos and order.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the phenomena of the racialization within the TV media. In particular, it has examined the TV show *COPS* and how it engages in problematized portrayals of racialized groups in particular Blacks. Through lenses of Gerbner et al (1988; 1976), Hall et al (2013; 1972), Gitlin (1979), Zillman (2000; 1975), Barthes (1957), and Colaguori (2012; 2010) *COPS* has been examined as a media tool for the reproduction of societal order and racial hegemony (Colaguori, 2012; 2010). *COPS* perpetuates the stereotype of the criminal Black man and intensifies the world wide phenomena of racial profiling. Whether it is Islamophobia or street crime and young Blacks, the media has become a mechanism to generate hysteria and moral panics about a particular demographic for purposes of system reproduction and domination (see Gitlin, Hall, Colaguori, and Gramsci). While not all criminal activity takes place in the inner city or in predominantly Black neighborhoods, the selective portrayal *COPS* affords its viewers and the law and order/crime control ideology it promotes, primarily focuses on such offences. Police become societal heroes through their bravery of protecting society from the dangerous Black other in a gladiatorial spectacle of ‘us and them.’

This study has shown that the overrepresentation of Blacks as criminals on *COPS* perpetuates negative racial stereotypes. Although in fictional television programs racial minorities are very sensitively presented, in crime reality programs where there is a greater influence on audiences’ perceptions, the simplified image of crime as predominantly committed by Blacks is common. Viewers come to see the world as a dangerous and violent place, through the medias natural representation



of crime as a problem caused by visible minorities (Gerbner 1988). COPS overrepresentation of Whites as victims may consequently make Whites more concerned about criminality as a social problem. This is substantiated by the growth of the home security business becoming a multibillion-dollar industry.

Shows like COPS reinforce the notion that criminals are not like us. It is not the teenage neighbor or the corporate executive, but the young Black 'thug' in the inner city that society needs to worry about. It is not the conditions of poverty or lack of opportunity but their inherent biological nature that drives them to crime. Viewers are not required to decode the message portrayed in COPS as encoded, as the programs viewers already hold heightened levels of racism and support for more crime control policies (Oliver et al, 1998). Regardless, it is easy for politicians to sell more punitive and authoritative crime control measures to keep this dangerous other from infiltrating our neighborhoods and perverting our belongings. However, this has had fatal consequences for young Blacks who have been shot or incarcerated at a rate higher than apartheid South Africa (Alexander, 2012. Pg. 7). Like apartheid South Africa and Jim Crow America, Blacks in particular spaces have become de-facto guilty and in violation of social order. However, this is likely a secondary concern in a supposed post-racial society where citizens and police have been granted the justifiable power to decide 'who to make live and who to let die' without real repercussion (Foucault, 1976).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Post-racial can be defined as relating to a society where racial prejudice and discrimination do not exist.

COPS brings up a number of questions about the role of the police. While by definition their role is to patrol, enforce laws, and respond to emergency calls, arguably it is more centered on protecting the interests of the elite (whether as a control mechanism like it was in the Southern United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century where policing was set up as a system designed to control slaves, or as in the more egalitarian North as officials responsible for responding to emergency calls and helping those in need), racial profiling has become a justifiable tool for the police to use skin colour as a form of evidence and a way to keep the population in line and get undesirables off the streets. However, racial profiling is not necessarily going to eliminate crime. If police continue to profile a group they are incarcerating at an increasing rate, offenders in that specific demographic will decrease. This will result in a neglect of the remaining population leading to offenders from other racial demographics going unbeknownst to police. This should cause the overall number of offenders to increase. *COPS* makes it appear as though they are successfully eliminating crimes, but in reality, they are spending the majority of their time policing a small percentage of the population.

Crime reality programs could be informational and provide an educational service to viewers. The ride-along style could take viewers into less fortunate neighborhoods where crime takes place and help to place crime in a broader context. Such programs have the potential to give a voice to those rarely heard and show just how mundane policing, crime, and criminals usually are. Crime is rarely well planned out, but simple vandalism by the boy next door. On occasion an officer on *COPS* will describe the living and working conditions of offenders or victims and

suggest that crime has nothing to do with biological inferiority, but is a byproduct of a lack of employment, deteriorating schools, nonexistent social services, and decaying housing that explain more about crime than the mindset of offenders. However, *COPS* airtime is consumed by violence and drugs. Crime becomes an issue of the impoverished and a battle between White police officers and racialized community members that generally ends in police making an arrest. It could be argued that *COPS* is nothing but a mirror image of crime in society. However, studies suggest otherwise (Oliver, 1994; Monk-Turner, 2007; Mastro 2005). Crime on *COPS* is not consistent with criminal statistics and thereby it would make more sense to say that *COPS* is a caricature of crime that is confined to media and audience demands then a showcase of reality. The spectacle of reality crime is set, requiring no lengthy investigations or enquiries over the offences committed by the powerful. The police are simply followed around, with the media waiting for dramatic bits of street crime that neatly fit into the law and order/crime control ideology of crime. What is shown is edited, shaped, and misconstrued to fit the genre and disseminated for mass consumption.

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