



Counter-Hegemony in *Boyz n the Hood*

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ABSTRACT

Mass mainstream media plays a fundamental role in how we perceive and come to understand society. In the case of youth crime, mainstream media often presents sensationalized depictions of youth engaging in criminal activity that is significantly detached from its occurrence in actuality. Such sensationalized media discourses often overlook the reality of youth crime in society and how the broader forms of structural violence, such as neoliberalism and tough-on-crime policies, facilitate the conditions for crime and violence to occur in the first place. This results in significant disparities in policing and crime control policies which disproportionately target impoverished and racialized youth analyzed within the context of the United States. Focusing on John Singleton's 1991 film *Boyz n the Hood*, this analysis explores how mass mainstream media, which perpetuates sensationalized discourses regarding youth crime, may also be a site where hegemonic narratives of youth crime can be deconstructed, to which Singleton utilizes the medium of film to do so.

KEYWORDS: *Youth Crime, Racial Disparity, Structural Violence, Counter-Hegemony, Media Discourse*

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Introduction

Media plays a fundamental role in how we perceive and come to understand society. In the case of youth crime, mainstream media often presents sensationalized depictions of youth as violent, prone to criminality, and inherently evil (Minaker & Hogeveen, 2009, p.13). For this analysis, mainstream media encompasses news media, both print and visual (e.g., CNN, FOX, the New York Times), and entertainment media (e.g., television shows and film) (Larson, 2006, p. 2). Misleading and sensationalized representations of youth crime, particularly in the case of young Black males are dominant in mainstream media, as Black males are commonly "... overrepresented as perpetrators of violent crime when news coverage is compared with arrest rates" (Entman & Gross, 2008, p. 98). Additionally, one study analyzing local Los Angeles news coverage found that Black people were almost two and a half times more likely to be portrayed as felons than whites, and African Americans accused of committing a crime composed 37% of television coverage disproportionate to the group's actual arrest rate of only 21% (Dixon & Linz, 2000, pp. 143-145). The criminalization of Black males propagated and maintained, in one way, through the vehicle of mainstream media systematically ingrains a popular image of Black males in inaccurate and demonized scripts (Jackson, 2006; Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). As a result, problematic misrepresentations often result in "...general antagonisms towards Black males; exaggerated views related to criminality and violence; reduced attention to structural and other big-picture factors; and public support for punitive approaches to problems" among the public ("The Opportunity Agenda," 2011, p. 14). With this said, this paper seeks to analyze the structural factors that are commonly overlooked in mainstream media portrayals of crime committed by young Black males within the context of the U.S. This includes the popularity of "...rational actor models of crime control [that] have acted as a major resource for policy makers in the last two decades" and holds individuals accountable as rational decision makers who simply chose to commit crime, devoid of any structural precursors (Garland, 2001, pp. 15-16); the impact of widespread deindustrialization and neoliberal policy shifts on the life chances of racialized and impoverished individuals; tough-on-crime legislation that has historically and disproportionately targeted Black males; and others. This paper draws upon the concept of "structural violence" to illustrate the social structures characterized by poverty and steep grades of social inequality, including racism and gender inequality, which largely constrains the agency of marginalized individuals and subjects them to violence (Farmer, 2004, pp. 307-315). In turn, these factors implicate individual actors as accountable for their own life circumstances (Ibid). Indeed, sensationalist media discourses that overlook the structural and emphasize the individual largely fail to acknowledge that youth crime has been declining since the 1990s, that youth are more likely to be victims rather than perpetrators of crime, that the crimes they do commit are largely non-violent, and that tough-on-crime initiatives (e.g., programs such as Scared Straight, Boot Camps, stop-and-frisk) are generally counter-productive in controlling or preventing criminality (Alexander, 2010; Minaker & Hogeveen, 2009, p.13; Welsh &

Rocque, 2014). Despite the decontextualized and individualized mainstream media representations that influence public perceptions of and responses to youth crime, tools of mainstream media such as film can be repurposed to contest the status quo and hegemonic representations, rather than reproduce them. Just as media can construct realities, counter-hegemonic media can deconstruct them as well, depending on who controls the narrative. It is important to note that mainstream media differs from counter-hegemonic forms of media as it exists in and perpetuates a capitalist economic framework, operates out of self-interest and works towards the preservation of the status quo (Larson, 2006, p. 6), which for the purposes of this analysis refers to the continued disproportionate vilification of Black lives and maintenance of a neoliberal and capitalist state. For this analysis, I argue that John Singleton's 1991 film *Boyz n the Hood* facilitates a successful counter-hegemonic narrative at a time where not only media, but political discourse constructed the threat of "...a generation of a new kind of hyper-dangerous, predatory young Black male criminals" thus created "a 1980s and 1990s Black crime panic across America that persuaded political representatives and the majority public that more law and order was needed to protect [against young Black men]" (Wilson, 2005 in Squires, 2007, p. 103). Within this context, *Boyz n the Hood* provides a counter-hegemonic narrative to media discourses that serve to decontextualize youth crime from its structural roots. This analysis further argues that, through concentrating on the intersections of gender, race and class, *Boyz n the Hood* is an exploration of youth violence that interrogates conventional responses to deviant youth and challenges mainstream media discourses which frame crime as a choice. Such counter-hegemonic narratives are essential in combatting baseless and propagated mainstream media discourses of crime that have played a significant role in contributing towards punitive, tough-on-crime legislation and practices, the likes of which will be further explored. The consequences of which not only result in counter-productive approaches to crime control, but also stand to violate, overwhelmingly, the civil liberties of impoverished and racialized youth. Indeed, despite the fact that *Boyz n the Hood* and the political climate of the 1980s and 1990s in which the film is set in takes place approximately 30 years ago, it still has significant relevance as the ramifications of demonizing mainstream media portrayals and tough-on-crime policies are still felt by a significant portion of Black Americans even today (Alexander, 2010). Therefore, counter-hegemonic narratives propelled by Black Americans such as Singleton's *Boyz n the Hood*, and presently the #BlackLivesMatter movement, are creative acts of resistance utilizing various forms of traditional and, in the case of #BlackLivesMatter social media, where Black Americans themselves control the narrative (Carney, 2016). And in doing so, they contest hegemonic mainstream media representations, which can be a matter of life or death, as evident with the consequences of mainstream media representations to be discussed.

Criminalization of Black lives, Gramsci & Counter-Hegemony

As stated above, this analysis argues that *Boyz n the Hood* provides a counter-hegemonic

narrative to hegemonic mainstream media portrayals of young Black males, as well as challenges the framing of crime as choice. Counter-hegemony is a useful tool for the purpose of this analysis as it works to resist hegemonic mainstream media representations that project “criminality ... as an expression of Black culture through the gradual replacement of ‘gangs’ as a central sign for urban Black teens ... [which] prompts coercive social solutions” (Artz & Murphy, 2000, p. 98). This analysis is grounded in Gramsci’s concept of hegemony for, as Hall (1986) finds, although “Gramsci did not write about race, ethnicity or racism in their contemporary meanings or manifestations ... to read Gramsci [as exclusively Marxist] would ... be to commit the error of literalism” (p. 9). Thus, for this analysis, hegemony is functional in illustrating “... the ‘naturalness’ of existing relations of power, backed by the coercion of the state apparatus (the police, courts, etc.). This consensus is diffused through the institutions of civil society, for example, ... the media” (Pratt, 2004, pp. 318-319). This “naturalness” (Ibid) is crucial to the concept of hegemony, as it operates to convince the public by means of their own consent rather than through coercion, that there is no alternative to the existing order. As such, hegemonic mainstream media representations work to produce, maintain and reflect a manufactured consensus. For instance, social constructions such as Black-on-Black crime, Welfare Queens, and the War on Drugs, that were pervasive throughout political and mainstream media discourses in the U.S. in the late 20th century operated to persuade political representatives and the majority of the public that corrective and punitive measures against Black Americans were ‘justified’ and necessary (Wilson, 2005 in Squires, 2007, p. 103). In other words, hegemonic mainstream media representations of Black Americans in limited and demonizing scripts were successful in persuading the public to consent to the increased surveillance, policing and subjugation of this population (Barkhan & Cohn, 1994; Johnson, 2008). Meanwhile, structural failures (e.g., welfare to workfare, deindustrialization, rising unemployment, anti-Black racism in hiring and in accessing post-secondary education), were manufactured as individual failures through the demonization as well as responsabilization (e.g., individuals held responsible for structural failures) of Black Americans (Squires, 2007, p. 103). In this light, hegemonic mainstream media representations work to misrepresent the order of inequality caused by outside factors such as neoliberal policies as a system of equality. This allows for the violent impact of neoliberal policies on particularly racialized Americans to remain undisturbed. However, within civil society, counter-hegemony entails challenging and deconstructing hegemonic representations perpetuated by such institutions (Pratt, 2004, p. 319). Indeed, sites of hegemonic mainstream media representations breed sites of resistance to the prevailing ‘natural’ order and provide nuance in the face of hegemonic mainstream media representations which strips away the voices of those it demonizes. As hegemonic mainstream media representations work to avert the gaze of civil society downwards to individual culpability, counter-hegemony works to realign our gaze upwards to recognize the broader structural forces responsible.

Structural Precursors

Boyz n the Hood was written and directed by John Singleton in 1991. In his directorial debut, Singleton sought to reclaim the portrayal of life growing up in South Central Los Angeles from the perspective of someone like him: a young Black male. The film serves to counter mainstream media hegemonic discourses associated with South Central at the time that defined the region as a cesspool of gang violence, crack cocaine and drive-by shootings (McCann, 2017, p. 29). The film is a coming-of-age story centered on the life of Tre Styles, a smart, young Black male whose father Furious raises to make responsible choices growing up in the hood and to be critical of the difficulties imposed onto their community by broader structural precursors, which will be explored below.

Singleton's depiction of South Central, L.A. from 1984 to 1991 as the backdrop of the film is fundamental in illustrating the effects of broader structural determinants Furious tries to keep Tre safe from. Firstly, South Central, L.A. has faced a history of significant economic deterioration. The decline and outsourcing of unionized jobs starting in the 1950s resulted in high levels of unemployment and a lack of opportunities for upward mobility, which disproportionately affected the African American community (McCann, 2017, p. 29). South Central Los Angeles, which was once the "traditional industrial core of the city", saw a steep decline in employment between 1978 and 1982, where 70,000 manufacturing jobs were lost and unemployment rates for Black males in some areas of South Central reached 50% (Johnson et al., 1992, p. 359-361). What was once a prosperous region now faced an abundance of low-wage, precarious labour due to the rise of "rapid deindustrialization" brought about by neoliberal policies of state retrenchment and propelled by a Laissez Faire economic philosophy dominant in the U.S. under the presidency of Ronald Reagan (Johnson et al., 1992, p. 362; McCann, 2017, p. 29). Structural economic precursors to poverty and unemployment significantly affecting Black Americans were further compounded with discrimination and anti-Black racism in hiring practices (Johnson et al., 1992, p. 361). Moreover, despite the widespread state imposed deterioration of communities like South Central, political representatives made no effort to revitalize the region, as, at the time "...the local city government has pursued consciously a policy of downtown and Westside redevelopment at the expense of South Central Los Angeles" (Ibid).

Hand in hand with deindustrialization came the proliferation of austerity measures executed across the country during the Reagan era and onward. What this meant for inner-city and largely racialized communities like South Central was the systematic dismantling of social safety nets to aid in the life chances of individuals including: the defunding of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) which provided racialized youths in inner-cities with increased access and support to post-secondary education, social and economic mobility that, when defunded, impacted inner-city youth the hardest (Johnson et al., 1992, p. 363); and the transition of welfare to workfare facilitated largely

in part by the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act which imposed stringent time-limits and restrictions on receiving social assistance such as transition to work as soon as possible and banning “teenage mothers, newborn babies, convicted felons, and legal immigrants” from eligibility (Marchevsky & Theoharis, 2000, p. 235). Furthermore, educational policy reforms in the late 1970s and 1980s sought to address educational under-attainment in the U.S. through measures such as “tracking by ability group, grade retention, and the increasing reliance on standardized tests as the ultimate arbiter of educational success ... disenfranchised large numbers of Black and Brown youth” (Johnson et al., 1992, p. 361). In South Central specifically, this resulted in dropout rates between 63% to 79% among Black youth (Ibid).

The noted structural forms of violence were further compounded with the state-constructed War on Drugs, which legitimized the onslaught and acceleration of tough-on-crime policies that disproportionately impacted racialized and impoverished individuals (Schlesinger, 2011). In 1995, Black Americans made up only 12% of the U.S. population yet 53% of individuals incarcerated for the first time in the 20th century (Wacquant, 2009, p. 61). The tough-on-crime policies responsible for such disproportionate imprisonment rates among racialized individuals across the U.S. include: the truth in sentencing act that served to lengthen the sentences of individuals, mandatory minimum sentences for narcotics possession which served to both lengthen and increase sentences of offenders, and three strikes laws wherein offenders convicted of “three serious or specially designated felonies” would potentially be subject to lifetime imprisonment (Wacquant, 2009, p. 66). Moreover, harsher penalties for the use of crack cocaine than powder cocaine where “...the racial disparities that have accompanied the prosecution and sentencing of federal crack offenders have been dramatic, with African Americans constituting 85% of defendants [in the late 20th and early 21st century] (Mauer, 2004, p. 84); and the general tendency of Black Americans to be stopped more frequently by police than their white-counterparts (Tory & Matthew, 2008, p. 6; Alexander, 2010) all contribute to the rate at which Black Americans are over-incarcerated. The lasting impact of which largely limits the ability of Black Americans to live a life free from inequality due to the structural forms of violence imposed by a criminal record that include ineligibility of student loans, finding a place to live in both private markets and public housing, restrictions in employment, and a significant negative impact on mental and physical health post incarceration, to name a few (Fellner, 2004 in Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008, p. 629; Porter, 2016, p. 9).

Wacquant (2002) summarizes the aforementioned structural precursors to systematic mass incarceration of people of colour as “...the incipient replacement of the welfare regulation of poverty and of the urban disorders spawned by mounting social insecurity and racial strife by its penal management via the police, courts, and correctional system” (p. 19). This penal management shift

that Wacquant (2002) speaks to was complimented by the popularity of rational actor models of crime control among policy makers in the U.S., as discourses of crime as derivative of individual choice made by rational actors (rather than born of structural precursors) re-emerged during the late 20th century (Garland, 2001, pp, 15-16). Rational actor models of crime control similarly utilized the rhetoric that legitimized the retrenchment of social safety nets; that the poor were undeserving of compassion or support by the state for their poverty and/or involvement in criminality was a result of individualized and moral failures (Garland, 2001, p. 102; Marchevsky & Theoharis, 2000, p. 235). Under a political climate that discredited the rehabilitative and interventionist methods of crime control of the 1960s, criminal justice policy of the 1980s took a zero-tolerance turn indicating that crime "... was a matter of anti-social and of rational individual choice in the face of lax law enforcement and lenient punishment regimes" (Garland, 2001, p. 101), thus requiring penal policies. And importantly, such representations of criminality were overwhelmingly racialized to Black Americans and solidified in the mind of the public largely in part by hegemonic media discourses (Garland, 2001, p. 102; Gillman et al., 1996; Iyengar, 1996, p. 59, Squires, 2007, p. 103).

Given the structural precursors to the disproportionate over-incarceration and over-policing of Black Americans provided, it is necessary to note that the aim of this analysis is not to conflate the life experience of Black people in the U.S. exclusively with (mis)representations of poverty or criminality. For instance, the number of Black American males in post-secondary education largely outnumbers those incarcerated (Desmond-Harris, 2015); African American youth are less likely to engage in substance use than their white-counterparts (Mitchell & Caudy, 2015, p. 4); and although more than one in four African Americans lives below the poverty line, as opposed to one in nine whites, the majority of African Americans are middle class (Pattillo, 2013, p. 2). Moreover, Black Americans have been at the forefront of the struggle for civil rights, of which a significant portion has included the fight for "...a fairer distribution of police services, less use of deadly force, [and] greater respect for individual rights", that invariably benefits all of society, Black and non-Black alike (Williams & Murphy, 1990, p. 2). This is not to overlook the structural forms of violence in place that constrain the agency of racialized individuals, more so than their white counterparts. Rather, it is to demonstrate that, with stories of racialized state and structural violence that this analysis focuses on, there are also stories of perseverance, prosperity and resilience. As Hooks (2004) writes, "We know that while race and racism may overdetermine many aspects of our lives, we are still free to be self-determining" (p. 19).

Boyz n the Hood & Counter-Hegemony

Boyz n the Hood seeks to counter narratives of crime, specifically youth crime, as choice and portrays the detrimental effects broader structural determinants have had on life in South Central.

For instance, in the first scene of the film it is 1984, Tre and his friends are 10 years old when they visit the scene of a shooting in their neighbourhood that transpired the night before. The crime scene is littered with photos of the recently re-elected President Ronald Reagan, whose image has been riddled with bullet holes. As discussed, the pervasiveness of neoliberal policies under the U.S. presidency of Ronald Reagan significantly affected areas like South Central in the 1980s and onwards. This powerful image signifies not only how Reagan's presidency may be seen as a cause of violence, but also symbolizes opposition to and protest against Reagan's political legacy among the South Central community. Singleton's use of Reagan's image demonstrates the violent effects that neoliberal policies have had on racialized, impoverished communities expected to responsabilize in the absence of social supports and/or stable, well-paid employment.

The structural determinism of crime is also portrayed in a scene set seven years later. Now 17, Tre, along with other bystanders, listens to a speech by his father about how the process of gentrification has reduced the economic value of their neighbourhood. An elderly man rejects this argument, claiming that it is the youth shooting each other and selling crack that is bringing the value down. Furious counters this by suggesting that the man's claim reflects only what hegemonic media discourses want the public to believe. Furious argues that the prevalence of crack, liquor stores and gun stores in their communities are external efforts by the state to perpetuate 'Black-on-Black' violence. Significantly, although Singleton opens the film with the statistic that "one out of every 21 Black males will be murdered before he is 25, most will die at the hands of other Black men", Singleton dedicates the film towards unpacking this socially constructed and hegemonic narrative. In this scene, Singleton through Furious shifts the gaze of members of his community, as well as the viewer, away from hegemonic media representations that centre Blackness as the source of Black-on-Black violence, rather than "poverty ... economic circumstance or social situatedness" (Wilson, 2005, p. 4). For, as Furious argues, state and structural violence such as community deterioration (e.g. gentrification, influx of harmful substances) serve to constrain agency of young Black men living in communities like South Central impacted by these broader forces in multiple forms such as a lack of community based organizations and barriers to education and employment. This constrained agency is evident across the U.S. in the late 20th century, where "...the crack/cocaine and heroin industries were the only dynamically growing equal-opportunity employers for inner-city men" (Bourgois, 2002, p. 303), especially within the communities that were hit hard by deindustrialization and subsequent levels of unemployment. Through this scene, Singleton reveals that this constrained agency imposed by broader structures serves to limit opportunities for young Black men, thus refuting the hegemonic discourse of crime simply as a matter of choice. Indeed, the violence resulting from neoliberal policies and state retrenchment evident in the film have claimed more lives than the propagated myth of "Black-on-Black" violence.

Boyz n the Hood revisits choice as it is constrained and underlined by larger structural factors, not only for Tre and his peers, but for their parents as well. Focusing his lens on parental choices and challenges, Singleton takes on the gendered expectations faced by youth and their guardians. The stereotype of the inability of single, racialized mothers to raise law-abiding children is widespread in media and popular discourse (Phoenix, 1996, p. 175). In the film, Tre's mother Reva sends him to live with his father Furious at the age of 10, fearing that Tre's suspension from school might signal the potential for his behaviour to spiral out of control, leading him towards a path of substance addiction, imprisonment, or death. While dropping off her son, Reva recounts to Furious what he had previously told her; that only he can teach Tre how to be a man. On one level, this seems to feed into perceptions of single mothers as being unable to raise their male children to be law-abiding citizens. However, as it is made clear through the film's progression, the difficulty single mothers may face in raising their children does not stem from their gender, but rather from socio-economic constraints that limit the abilities of single mothers. For instance, the absence of fathers as a risk factor for juvenile delinquency has been challenged as lacking evidentiary or empirical support (McMurtry & Curling, 2008, pp. 63-64). Rather, support provided for families is limited to two-parent households, while single parent households fail to receive additional governmental support and as a result have more constrained time and greater stress (Ibid). This is evident in the case of Reva, for her abilities to keep Tre out of trouble do not stem from the perception that, as a woman, she cannot teach him 'how to be a man'. Rather, the film places emphasis on how the time she has to interact with Tre is constrained by her employment and pursuit of a Master's degree in order to provide a better life for her and her son. Reva's struggles and her subsequent decision to send Tre to live with his father reflect the difficult choices required of single parents. Towards the end of the film when Tre is set to go off to college, Reva commends Furious on his success in raising Tre to be a responsible adult, yet states what he did is merely what mothers have been doing since the beginning of time. By showing the structural limitations around single parenthood, Singleton serves to debunk myths surrounding the supposed ineptitude of single mothers in raising their children.

Throughout the film, Singleton contests the uncritical acceptance of certain constructions of criminality (such as Black-on-Black violence and single Black motherhood as a precursor to youth crime) as realistic indicators of Black violence and criminality, which, as stated, are messages advanced by mainstream media discourses. One of the prevailing hegemonic representations related to youth crime derives from the hegemonic media process of portraying isolated acts of youth violence as evidence of a broader trend or epidemic of youth gang activity (Faucher, 2009, p. 441). Moreover, hegemonic media discourses of youth engaged in gang activity are often contained to racialized, lower-class neighbourhoods and disproportionately target symbols that are associated with Black culture (Artz & Murphy, 2000, p. 98). Young Black men often find that their apparel and,

at times “use of public space by designating certain neighbourhood locations as crime hotspots” are identified by police as red flags for gang activity (Brunson & Miller, 2005, p. 624). For instance, in a qualitative study of 40 interviews of youth about their experiences and perceptions of police harassment, it was found among African American youth that having “gold in your mouth” or “saggin’ [pants]” signifies to police that youth with such outwardly appearances are likely to be in a gang (Brunson & Miller, 2005, pp. 624-627). The fictional characters of Tre and his friends, as young Black men fit what is referred in police subculture as “Symbolic Assailants”, that is, “...a perceptual shorthand to identify ... persons who use gesture, language and attire that the policeman has come to recognize as a prelude to violence ... a preamble to a later attack” (Skolnick, 1994, p. 266). This serves as an example of the challenges and problematic nature of ‘predictive’ policing based on ‘probable’ indicators of criminality. Significantly, Skolnick (1994) finds that “the patrolman ... probably in most communities, has come to identify the Black man with danger” (p. 267). As is evident in the film, Tre and the racially segregated space of South Central are constantly surveilled; demonstrated throughout the film with the imagery of police helicopters patrolling South Central and instances of racial profiling. However, at no point in the film is it explicitly stated that any of the characters in the film are gang members. Singleton tempts the viewer to assume that the youths in the film are in a gang (e.g., Doughboy’s friends usually seen in blue, while Ferris’ friends associated with red). Nevertheless, and in line with Singleton’s counter-hegemonic narrative, stereotypes and images commonly associated with gang activity are not deterministic of gang activity in any way, no matter how fervently hegemonic media discourses or police subculture suggests otherwise. In this way, Singleton also provides an image of non-gang affiliated crime as an alternative to the hegemonic representations that conflate inner-city racialized youth with gang membership (Artz & Murphy, 2000, p. 98). Thus, counter-hegemonic films like *Boyz n the Hood* are critical as they work to dispel racialized and sensationalized generalizations of gang membership that legitimize disproportionate police practices against criminalized and racialized groups. For instance, Brunson & Miller (2006) find that, unequivocally, racialized youth are disproportionately subjected to police misconduct, surveillance and harassment (p. 614). Evidently, the tendency of media discourses to homogenize young Black males as gang members can have significant and detrimental effects. Take for instance the rate at which young Black males are more likely to be the recipients of police use of excessive or lethal force than their white counterparts (Nowacki, 2015, p. 649) and the “... unchecked police killings of mostly Black men once every 28 hours ... excessive use of force even in the handling of non-violent crime [and] continued practices of chokeholds despite being the ongoing subject of more than 1000 civilian complaints” (Heitzeg, 2015).

Leading on from this, Singleton demonstrates how punitive and discriminatory crime control methods that stem from distorted media depictions of youth crime can serve to re-victimize youth and

limit their opportunities. This occurs, in one way, through the continued support for tough-on-crime policies and practices by both the public and criminal justice system agents. For instance, Roberts et al. (2003) argues that “as public policy is based on public opinion, [it follows that] public opinion is conditioned by media output” (p. 85). This is clearly problematic for, sensationalist media discourses, as argued, disproportionately portray negative (mis)representations of Black males (Jackson, 2006). In turn, as members of the public, those in the criminal justice system can be influenced and informed by distorted media representations in the administration of justice such as, during criminal justice policy development as well as sentencing decisions (Roberts et al., 2003, p. 85). Significant to the present analysis, one study finds “...about a third of judges, court administrators, corrections officials, and others in law enforcement believed that news coverage had led to substantive changes in the administration of justice” (Dopplet, 1992, p. 125). It would be inaccurate, however, to state that police misconduct and harassment towards racialized youth is solely derived from distorted hegemonic media representations. In contrast, hegemonic media discourses, in conjunction with criminal justice policies, the courts, citizens, police administration, myths, stories and situational contexts are all drivers of police subculture and play a role in guiding daily police work (Crank, 2004, p. 5; Shearing & Ericson, 1991). Punitive policies informed by distorted public understanding of crime and criminality is evident in the case of Doughboy who first comes into the criminal justice system at 10 years old for the petty offence of shoplifting, and since then has been in and out of prison seven years later. Despite his desire to stay out of trouble, Doughboy continues to engage in selling substances, murders his brother’s killers, and ends up dead himself. As the only character in the film to have been in contact with the criminal justice system as a child, Singleton demonstrates through the character of Doughboy the ineffectiveness of tough-on-crime policies for youth from a deterrent standpoint. Imprisonment does little to reduce reoffending and, adversely, may increase the chance of reoffending later on (Doob, 1995, p. 87). Critics of tough-on-crime policies recognize the ineffectiveness of punitive crime control methods, as they do nothing to alleviate the factors that inspired the offence in the first place, “...which for many disenfranchised youth are made by unaddressed systemic issues of racism, poverty and neglect” (Minaker & Hogeveen, 2009, p. 255). With Doughboy, Singleton’s counter-hegemonic narrative suggests that the tough-on-crime policies so often championed by hegemonic media and political discourse provide no solutions to the phenomenon of youth delinquency. They exclude from their discussions not only the social determinants of youth offending, but also the voices of youth themselves.

The day after Doughboy avenges his brother Ricky’s death (who was murdered by another youth), he is shown talking to Tre about a television report on foreign places affected by violence, when it occurs to him that “...either they [mainstream news media] don’t know, don’t show, or don’t care about what’s going on in the hood” (Singleton, 1991). This final dialogue of the film

epitomizes exclusionary mainstream media discourses that disregard violence so long as it is contained to racialized spaces, concealing the manifestations of structural violence imposed, in part, by neoliberalism, tough-on-crime policies and the individualizing rhetoric of crime and poverty discussed throughout this analysis. Moreover, *Doughboy* serves to highlight the silencing of the experiences of youth who are more often than not victims rather than perpetrators of crime. Singleton thus presents the need for the perspective of racialized youth to be given a space in discourses regarding youth and youth deviance where they are so often excluded (Minaker & Hogeveen, 2009, p. 271).

Conclusion

This analysis sought to explore the ways in which issues surrounding youth and youth deviance are portrayed in *Boyz in the Hood*. Overall, the film offers an effective counter-hegemonic narrative that contests hegemonic mainstream media discourses surrounding Black youth, crime and society. *Boyz n the Hood* is successful in dispelling stereotypes that perpetuate crime as a choice and deconstructing other conventional arguments regarding youth deviance. By this, Singleton provides a nuanced and unembellished account of the challenges young males face when growing up in racialized and criminalized spaces. Indeed, films like *Boyz n the Hood* facilitate the construction of a site of popular culture where hegemonic narratives can be contested, deconstructed, and rejected, and puts forth an alternative narrative that is also an act of creative resistance. One can draw contemporary parallels to counter-hegemonic creative resistance of the #BlackLivesMatter movement for “offering youth of color an opportunity to challenge dominant ideologies...contrary to mass media” (Carney, 2016, p. 193). The significance of such acts of creative resistance is substantial. As a result of sensationalized and often racialized media depictions, youth crime is often individualized and responsabilized to youth themselves, while structures such as neoliberal policies that facilitate the conditions for crime and violence to occur and significantly serve to constrain agency are ignored. As noted, this has resulted in calamitous racial disparities in policing, sentencing and even post-incarceration. Therefore, counter-hegemonic narratives such as *Boyz n the Hood* provide an alternative to hegemonic media discourses and demonstrate “that the greatest responsibility lies with the system” (Levi, 1988, p. 85), rather than racialized youth who are often depicted as violent, prone to criminality, and/or inherently evil.

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