

## Police Ten 7 feeds racial stereotypes of Māori and Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Police Ten 7 is a reality crime show that follows the police of Aotearoa New Zealand in responding to antisocial and criminal activity. In the current study, we coded 24 episodes of Police Ten 7, screened between 2011 and 2021. For each episode, each offence depicted was coded into one of five categories (i.e., aggressive, driving, drug and alcohol, property, or other) and the ethnicity of the suspect was also coded. We had two hypotheses. First, that Māori and Pasifika will be more likely to be depicted as committing violent crimes than Pākehā suspects. Second, that the proportion of aggressive offences Māori and Pasifika are depicted committing on Police Ten 7 will be higher than that drawn from the National Annual Apprehension statistics. Both hypotheses were supported.

**Keywords:** *Media, Prejudice, Stereotype*

### INTRODUCTION

Police Ten 7 is a reality crime show that follows the day-to-day activities of police officers in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2021, Auckland City Councillor Efeso Collins asked Television New Zealand (TVNZ) to drop Police Ten 7, stating "...the program showed young brown ppl. This stuff is low level chewing gum tv that feeds on racial stereotypes & it's time u acted as a responsible broadcaster & cut it". The Chief Executive of Screentime, the company behind Police Ten 7, argued that the company tries to provide "...an accurate portrayal of what the police are doing out in the streets" (Cardwell, 2021). Similarly, former host Graham Bell argued that the "...police don't select who they are looking for. The people who commit the crimes are the ones that select themselves to be sought" (McIvor, 2021).

Concerns regarding how race and ethnicity are depicted in reality-crime shows are not new, nor limited to Aotearoa New Zealand (Fishman & Cavender, 2018; Nickerson, 2019). Indeed, much of the literature on how race and ethnicity are represented in reality-crime shows has focused on US reality TV shows, including the long-running show COPS. Content analysis of these shows has consistently demonstrated that Black suspects are more likely to be depicted committing violent crimes than White suspects (Kooistra et al, 1998; Monk-Turner et al., 2007), and that police officers are significantly more likely to engage in aggressive behaviour when the criminal suspects are Black (Mastro & Robinson, 2000;

M. B. Oliver, 1994). Speaking to the impact of these portrayals on the viewing public, research has demonstrated that exposure to these programmes increases perceptions of danger, and negative evaluations, of Black people (M. B. Oliver, 1996; Ramasubramanian, 2011).

### ***Stereotypes of Māori and Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand***

To understand concerns regarding Police Ten 7, it is important to first understand the context, including the stereotyping of Māori and Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand (Archer & Archer, 1970; Holmes et al., 2001; Lynskey et al., 1991; P. Oliver & Vaughan, 1991; Sibley et al., 2011; Vaughan, 1962, 1964; Vaughan & Thompson, 1961). Several decades of research have demonstrated Pākehā stereotype Māori as "mean" (Vaughan, 1964), "potential thieves" (Archer & Archer, 1970), and "aggressive" (Lynskey et al., 1991). With respect to Pasifika, P. Oliver and Vaughan (1991) extended earlier studies by assessing Pākehā stereotypes of both Māori and Samoan people, the largest Pasifika ethnic group in Aotearoa New Zealand. Demonstrating damaging stereotypes are not restricted to Māori, the top five descriptors Pākehā used to describe Samoan people were "bludgers, overstayers" (45%), "violent" (34%), "stupid" (28%), "criminal" (26%), and "lazy" (26%). Reflecting the mixed nature of stereotypes, 20% of Pākehā also endorsed the descriptors "nice, good" and

“friendly, sociable”. While P. Oliver and Vaughan’s (1991) work is now dated, evidence that stereotypes of Pasifika are still prominent is evidenced by the popularity of television programs such as Jonah from Tonga (Boseley, 2020).

### **Media Portrayals of Māori and Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand**

In Aotearoa New Zealand, research has conclusively demonstrated that negative portrayals of Māori and Pasifika are prominent in discourses on health (Hodgetts et al., 2004; H. Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019; Rankine & McCreanor, 2004), politics (Galy-Badenas et al., 2021; McConville et al., 2014), and crime (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Barnes et al., 2013; Bull, 2017; Deckert, 2020; Loto et al., 2006; Maydell, 2018; McCreanor et al., 2014; Meek, 2013). With respect to crime, Thompson (1954) noted several decades ago that media was responsible for representing Māori in stereotypical and decontextualised ways. Fast forward several decades on and the stereotypical reporting of Māori and Pasifika continues unabated (Deckert, 2020; McCreanor et al., 2014). For example, Loto et al. (2006) analysed news reports that focused on Pasifika. Of the 65 news reports identified, negative attributes (e.g., uneducated, violent, obese) were mentioned in 92% of them, with positive attributes only identified in 31% of the reports.

### **Current Study**

To our knowledge, research on the portrayal of Māori and Pasifika on Police Ten 7 is limited to a single Master’s thesis (Podvoiskis, 2012) and a recent Honours dissertation (Busby-Pukeiti, 2021). Podvoiskis (2012) conducted a content analysis of the 2010 season (15 episodes) and reported that of the offenders arrested for committing a violent crime, 82% were Māori or Pasifika. When this proportion is compared to the 2010 National Annual Apprehension statistics, Māori and Pasifika are overrepresented in violent crime on Police Ten 7 (82% vs. 51.9% of 2010 apprehensions).

Given that there is contested public opinion about the way that Māori and Pasifika are portrayed on Police Ten 7, and especially in light of the position taken by the show’s executives, we sought to systematically analyse whether the show does, in fact, perpetuate negative stereotypes of Māori and Pasifika people. To do this, based on availability, we sourced Police Ten 7 episodes that screened between 2011 and 2021. For each episode, each offence depicted was coded into one of five categories (i.e., aggressive, driving, drug and alcohol, property, or other) and the ethnicity of the suspect was also coded. We had two hypotheses. First, that Māori and Pasifika will be more likely to be depicted as committing violent crimes than Pākehā suspects. Second, that the proportion of aggressive offences Māori and Pasifika are depicted committing on Police Ten 7 will be higher than that drawn from the National Annual Apprehension statistics.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

With only recent episodes available to stream on tvnz.co.nz, we sourced older episodes from etv.co.nz, an educational archive of media screened in Aotearoa New

Zealand. We also attempted to source episodes through Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, who hold the Television New Zealand Archive, but were told that they could not make the episodes available. Despite these limitations, we sourced a total of 24 episodes which had aired on the show between 2011 (Season 18) and 2021 (Season 28). We also sourced a single episode from Season 14.

### **Coding**

Coding was carried out by two coders, one identifying as Asian and the other identifying as Māori and Pākehā. The first coder coded all 25 episodes, while the second coder coded 25% (i.e., 6 episodes/19 offences). Each episode was coded for the type of offence committed and for the ethnicity of the suspect involved.

As noted above, offences were coded as *aggressive* (including, domestic argument, domestic assault, common assault, fighting), *driving related* (including, driving infringement, and incidents involving a car crash), *drug and alcohol related* (including, drug possession, being drunk in public, and drug distribution), *property related* (including, theft, arson, trespassing), or *other* (including being issued a warrant and noise-related offences). There was agreement between coders on 18 of 19 offences (94.74%).

In addition to the nature of the offence, the ethnicity of the alleged offender was coded. Following Podvoiskis (2012), ethnicity was classified using three methods: 1) self-identification, 2) narrator identification, and/or 3) researcher observation. It was our initial intention to code five ethnicity categories: Pākehā, Māori, Pasifika, Asian (including Indian), and Other. However, with the inconsistent explicit elaboration of ethnicity within the show, as well as the way faces had been obscured, it was very difficult to differentiate between Māori and Pasifika. We therefore had no alternative option but to combine Māori and Pasifika into a single category. While this is not ideal, Māori and Pasifika face comparable rates of discrimination in comparison to Pākehā. There was agreement between coders on 16 of 19 ethnicity codes (84.21%).

## **RESULTS**

In total, 81 offences were coded across the 25 episodes. Suspects were primarily Māori/Pacific ( $n = 42$ ) or Pākehā ( $n = 32$ ), followed by Asian ( $n = 3$ ) and a small group for whom ethnicity could not be determined ( $n = 3$ ). For the remaining offence, only the victim was shown on screen and thus the ethnicity of the suspect could not be coded. To focus on the seasons that followed Podvoiskis (2012), we excluded the single episode from season 14 for all subsequent analyses. Specifically, we analysed a total of 24 episodes, covering seasons 18 ( $n = 2$ ), 19 ( $n = 2$ ), 20 ( $n = 2$ ), 21 ( $n = 2$ ), 22 ( $n = 4$ ), 23 ( $n = 2$ ), 24 ( $n = 2$ ), 25 ( $n = 2$ ), 26 ( $n = 2$ ), 27 ( $n = 2$ ), and 28 ( $n = 2$ ).

Seventy-seven offences were coded across the 24 episodes. Suspects were primarily Māori/Pacific ( $n = 41$ , 53.25%) or Pākehā ( $n = 30$ , 38.96%), followed by Asian ( $n = 3$ , 3.90%) and a small group for whom ethnicity could not be determined ( $n = 3$ , 3.90%). The most common category depicted was offences of aggression ( $n = 28$ , 36.36%), followed by driving related offences ( $n = 22$ , 28.57%), property related offences ( $n = 16$ , 20.78%), drug

**Table 1.** The number of offences broken down by offence type and ethnicity.

Offence Type	Māori and Pasifika	Pākehā	Asian	Unknown	Total
Aggressive	18 64.29%	8 28.57%	1 3.57%	1 3.57%	28
Driving-Related	10 45.45%	9 40.91%	2 9.09%	1 4.55%	22
Property-Related	8 50.00%	7 43.75%	0 0%	1 6.25%	16
Drug & Alcohol-Related	4 50.00%	4 50.00%	0 0%	0 0%	8
Other	1 33.33%	2 66.67%	0 0%	0 0%	3

and alcohol related offences ( $n = 9$ , 10.39%), and other ( $n = 3$ , 3.90%; Table 1).

Consistent with our first hypothesis, Māori and Pasifika were more frequently depicted as committing violent crimes than Pākehā suspects (64.29% vs. 28.57%; Table 1). This difference was specific to the aggressive offence category, with the frequency of Māori and Pasifika committing driving-related, property-related, drug and alcohol related, and other crimes, similar to that of Pākehā. To test our second hypothesis, that Māori and Pasifika would be presented as committing violent crimes on Police Ten 7 at a disproportionate rate, we drew on New Zealand Police data (NZPolice, 2021). Specifically, focusing on aggressive offences, we calculated the total number of aggressive crimes committed by Māori and Pasifika and non-Māori-non-Pasifika, between 2014 and 2020. Consistent with our second hypothesis, relative to official statistics, Māori and Pasifika were overrepresented committing aggressive crimes on Police Ten 7 (64.29%) compared to their level of 53% of aggressive crimes in the police National Apprehensions data.

## DISCUSSION

In the current study, we analysed 24 episodes of Police Ten 7 which aired between 2011 and 2021. A total of 77 incidents were coded, 28 of which were specifically in relation to aggressive crimes. Consistent with our hypotheses, Māori and Pasifika were more likely to be depicted committing aggressive offences than Pākehā (64.29% vs. 28.57%). Although we identified a slightly less extreme bias compared to that of Podvoiskis (2012) in the analysis of the 2010 season (64.29% vs. 82% of aggressive offences), our data still support Auckland Councillor Efeso Collins' contention that Police Ten 7 "...feeds on racial stereotypes". Before discussing our results, it is important to call to attention the fact that Councillor Collins comments, in addition to generating a great deal of media attention, have resulted in him and his family receiving death threats (Latif, 2021). This response only adds to the burden of speaking out against social injustice, a burden that is disproportionately carried by the victims of that injustice.

As noted above, in response to criticism of the show, former host Graham Bell argued that "...police don't select who they are looking for. The people who commit the crimes are the ones that select themselves to be sought" (McIvor, 2021). To address Bell's comment, focusing on aggressive offences, we demonstrate that Māori and Pasifika are overrepresented on Police Ten 7 relative to national crime statistics (NZPolice, 2021). Beyond numbers,

Bell's argument ignores the contextual factors that contribute to offending, continuing the colonial tradition of depicting indigenous people as inherently violent and aggressive (Farr, 2019; Jackson, 1987; McCreanor et al., 2014; Morrison, 2009). Bell's 'reality' is a construction built upon the hegemonic discourse of colonialism, with the depiction of Māori (and other indigenous peoples) as inherently violent (A. Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012), something that has been broadcast through communication systems of anglophone and other European empires for centuries (Abel, McCreanor, & Moewaka Barnes, 2012). From this perspective, the mass media can be seen as a key instrument of Crown policy and its enactment (Ballara, 1986; McGregor & Comrie, 2002; Spoonley & Hirsh, 1990). To this day, with an expanding presence through social networking sites, mass media can still be viewed effectively as agents of the Crown, actively maintaining and defending the colonial state (Nairn & McCreanor, 2021).

The media has also supported the enactment of Crown policy against Pasifika. A clear example of this is the Dawn Raids. The Dawn Raids were carried out in the 1970s, with police entering the homes of Pasifika people in the early hours of the morning and demanding proof of residence (Allen & Bruce, 2017). The bias displayed by the Crown is revealed in the conviction rates for overstayers. Indeed, as Allen and Bruce (2017) note, despite representing only ~33% of overstayers, Pasifika represented ~86% of prosecutions for overstaying. The Dawn Raids occurred at a time when populist opinion and media coverage had shifted from casting Pasifika as hard working and valuable to Aotearoa New Zealand, to casting them as taking jobs from "New Zealanders" (Spoonley, 2012). This framing is captured by a cartoon run in 1975 by the National Party during its election campaign (National Party, 1975). The cartoon depicted many people arriving from overseas on planes and then cutting to a Pasifika male lining up to receive a job, the voice over then notes that "Then one day there weren't enough jobs either. The people became angry... And violence broke out. Especially among those who had come from other places expecting great things." While the voice over plays, the cartoon depicts Pasifika and Pākehā fighting outside a pub.

### Strengths and Limitations

Despite screening on television in Aotearoa New Zealand for more than 20 years, the current study is one of the very few that have conducted a content analysis of Police Ten 7 (Podvoiskis, 2012). While we acknowledge the authors of the recent Independent Report Commissioned by Television New Zealand (TVNZ) and Screentime note that they "...viewed a number of current and earlier episodes of Police Ten 7 from the early 2000s to the present day to assess the programme's evolution over time", it is not clear that they conducted any systematic content analysis (Bielecki & Quince, 2021). However, our finding that the bias has decreased since Podvoiskis (2012) (i.e., Māori and Pasifika representing 64.29% vs. 82% of aggressive offences), is consistent with Bielecki & Quince's (2021) conclusion that some aspects of Police Ten 7 have improved over time.

The current study is not without limitations. First, although based on the practical difficulty of reliably being able to identify the ethnicity of suspects, grouping Māori and Pasifika together is problematic. Future studies, utilising a larger sample of episodes, should attempt to use separate ethnicity codes. It is also advisable to use a larger number of coders and ensure that there are coders that identify as Māori and Pasifika. With respect to the number of episodes coded in the current study, we were severely restricted by the availability of episodes. As a result, statistical analysis of these data is limited by the relatively small number of incidents included in the 24 episodes that were coded. Moreover, in the absence of a larger database of episodes, we cannot be certain that the episodes that we analysed in the current study are an accurate and unbiased representation of all Police Ten 7. Access to a larger (or complete) database of episodes would ensure that the analyses would be representative of the show and would also improve the sample size such that robust statistical analyses could be undertaken.

Finally, it is important to note that national crime statistics may also inflate the proportion of aggressive offences committed by Māori and Pasifika. Indeed, as

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Bull (2017) notes, there are several filters that occur between a potential crime being committed and someone being convicted. For example, once a crime is committed, a member of the public must choose whether to report it to the police. Once reported, the police must then decide whether or not to record it as a crime. Without clear data on this issue, it is unknown how the ethnicity of a suspect may influence these choices (Bull, 2017; Hook, 2009). However, we concur with Bottomley and Pease (1986), who note "it would be very unwise to extrapolate" from conviction rates (i.e., the ethnicity of suspects known to the system) to the markedly larger number of people committing crimes that are not reported or officially recorded.

### Conclusion

TVNZ is a free-to-air public broadcasting network. Public broadcasting networks have the ostensible aim of providing a public service and engaging citizens. As a public broadcasting network in receipt of public funding, TVNZ is obliged to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi by broadcasting content that protects Māori people and culture. New Zealand On Air's funding strategy 2017 and Rautaki Maori plan specifically states a values-based approach and commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (NZOnAir, 2016, 2018). In particular, New Zealand On Air's Rautaki plan recognises that funded content should "uphold the mana tangata and mana iwi" (NZOnAir, 2018, p. 2). While we analysed some Police Ten 7 episodes prior to the introduction of this strategy, our analyses indicate that TVNZ still has work to do to fulfil this commitment.

In response to the complaints regarding stereotyping, and the report produced by Bielecki and Quince (2021), TVNZ has rebranded 'Police Ten 7' as 'Ten 7 Aotearoa' and stated that they will feature "... a broader range of communities around New Zealand" (Sowman-Lund, 2022). To ensure TVNS fulfils this commitment, we recommend that analyses such as those reported by Bielecki and Quince (2021), and those reported in the present paper, are conducted at regular intervals.

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